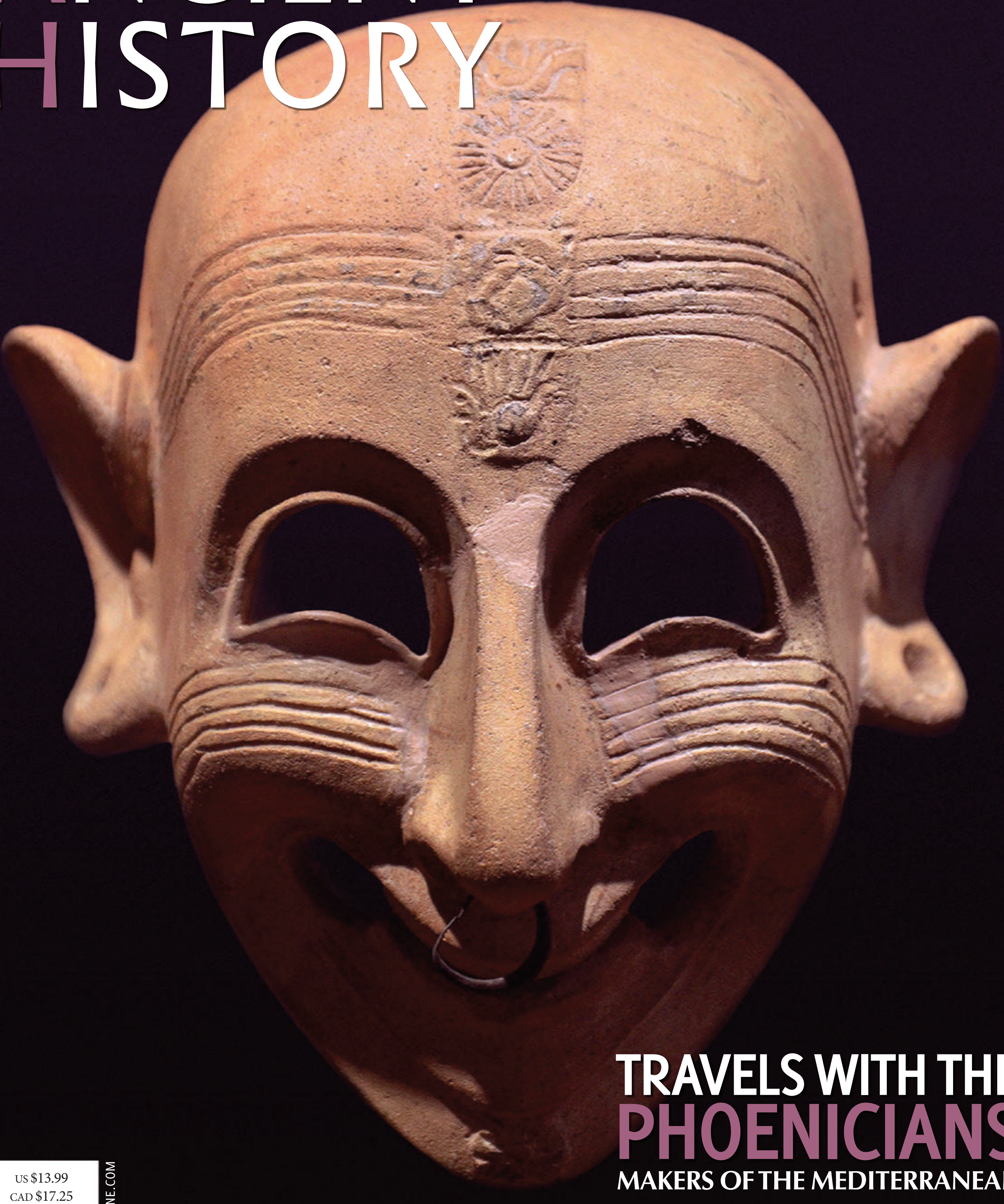
IN THIS ISSUE: THE EARLY PHOENICIANS – TRAVEL, TRADE, AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE (CA. 1000-500 BC)

ANCIENT HISTORY

NO. 53



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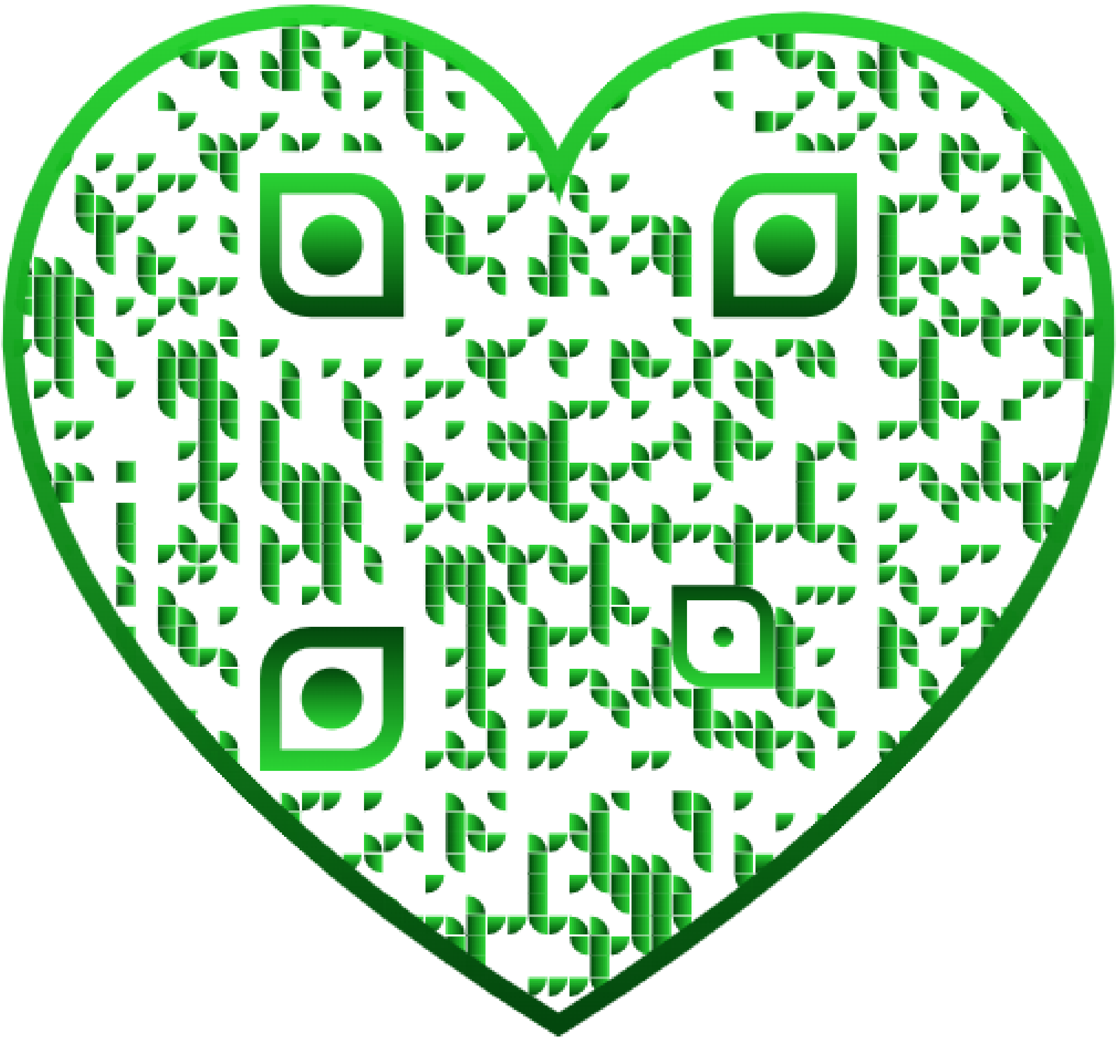

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Editor: Owain Williams
Assistant editor: Lauren van Zoonen
News editor: Lindsay Powell
Design & Media: Christianne C. Beall

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Contributors: Murray Dahm, Tim Howe, Carolina López-Ruiz, Philip Matyszak, Gregory Mumford, Iván Fumadó Ortega, Eleftheria Pappa, Lindsay Powell, Roy van Wijk, Gareth Williams

Illustrators: Jose Morán, Sean Ó Brógáin, Rafael Serra, Richard Thomson, William Webb

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Editorial office
PO Box 4082, 7200 BB Zutphen, The Netherlands
Phone: +31-848-392256 (Europe),
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E-mail: editor@ancienthistorymagazine.com
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ON THE COVER

An example of a Phoenician funerary mask of the so-called grotesque type, dated to the fourth century BC, from Caligari, Sardinia. The Phoenicians were a seafaring people who settled throughout the Mediterranean. They are frequently overlooked in ancient history, however, often only remembered for introducing the alphabet to the Greeks.

© Carole Raddato / Flickr

THE PHOENICIANS

Phoenicians ships sailed throughout the Mediterranean world, meeting new cultures and trading with them. They brought new technologies, art styles, and ways of thinking. Without them, the ancient world would have been very different.

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Having Alexander the Great as founder of their main city legitimized the Ptolemies.

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THE NEW CITY

Carthage was an important Phoenician colony, but its origins are the stuff of legend.

EDITORIAL – LITTLE PURPLE MEN

I have been thinking about putting together an issue of *Ancient History* on the Phoenicians for quite some time. As part of the interview process for this job, I had to put together an in-depth plan for an issue of *AH*, and that issue was to be on Phoenicians. What you see here is not quite a one-to-one reflection of my original plan. After all, the proposed issue was an ideal scenario, one which did not involve finding people to write the various articles nor that required consideration of the images that would be needed. However, despite that, there is still a lot of overlap, as well as elements that I had not initially considered.

My motivation for putting this issue together remains the same as when I first proposed it: the Phoenicians' impact on the ancient world is not properly appreciated. They weren't part of the curriculum during my undergraduate studies, only briefly appearing in discussions of ancient Greece, usually in their capacity as traders or due to their alphabet. Yet there is so much more to the Phoenicians than this. This issue only scratches the surface. I hope we revisit them again.

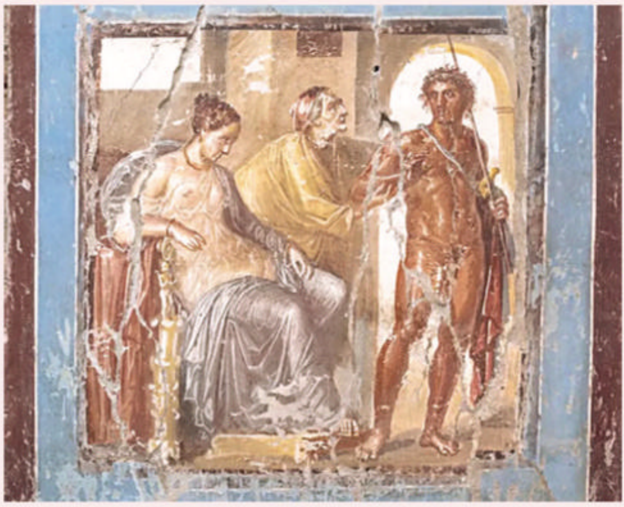
Owain Williams
Editor, *Ancient History*

Reading of an Old Phrygian inscription corrected

A researcher claims he has successfully deciphered a severely damaged inscription on a monument believed to be over 2600 years old. The find site, known as Arslan Kaya, meaning ‘lion rock’ in Turkish, features engravings of lions and sphinxes. The monument, which likely dates back to the Kingdom of Lydia, has suffered extensive damage due to weather and looting, complicating efforts to read the inscription, which has puzzled scholars since the 1800s. Mark Munn, Professor of Ancient Greek History and Archaeology, Department of Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies, The Pennsylvania State University now argues that the inscription contains the name ‘Materan’.

This name refers to a goddess revered by the Phrygians, who lived around the Sangarios River in what is now Turkey during the period 1200 to 600 BC. Invading Cimmerians sacked the Phrygian capital, Gordion, ca.

Tiny Pompeian house boasts lavish wall art


The fresco after which the Casa di Fedra, the recently-uncovered house, has been named, depicting Phaedra with her maid and Hippolytus.

© Parco archeologico di Pompei

In a central location along the Via dell’Abbondanza of Pompeii, archaeologists have uncovered an unusual building. Despite its small size, the house features elaborate frescoes and noteworthy features not seen in other properties of the ancient city.

Provisionally named Casa di Fedra, the decorations of this ‘tiny house’ in the insula of Casa dei Casti Amanti rival those of the nearby Casa dei Pittori al Lavoro. In the first of two rooms investigated at the rear of the house, splendidly decorated walls present scenes taken from classical mythology in the Fourth Style. Among them are a painting of Hippolytus and Phaedra, a *symplegma* (‘coupling’) between a satyr and a nymph, a small painting showing a divine couple (possibly Venus and Adonis), and another possibly depicting the Judgement of Paris.

The building also stands out for its lack of an *atrium* – a feature typical in wealthier Pompeian homes. A window beside the painting of Hippolytus and Phaedra opens onto a small courtyard where construction work was underway at the time of the eruption in AD 79. The entrance to the courtyard is marked by a small *lararium* (household shrine) with elaborate paintings of plant and animal motifs on a white background. Ritual offerings were found in it. Lab analysis has identified the remains of twigs of aromatic plants and two parts of a dried fig. The courtyard has a roofed area that precedes a large pool with red-painted walls. A channel runs around the pool, enabling rainwater to flow into the cistern below.

A votive offering, possibly depicting Silenus, discovered in the *lararium* of the Casa di Fedra.

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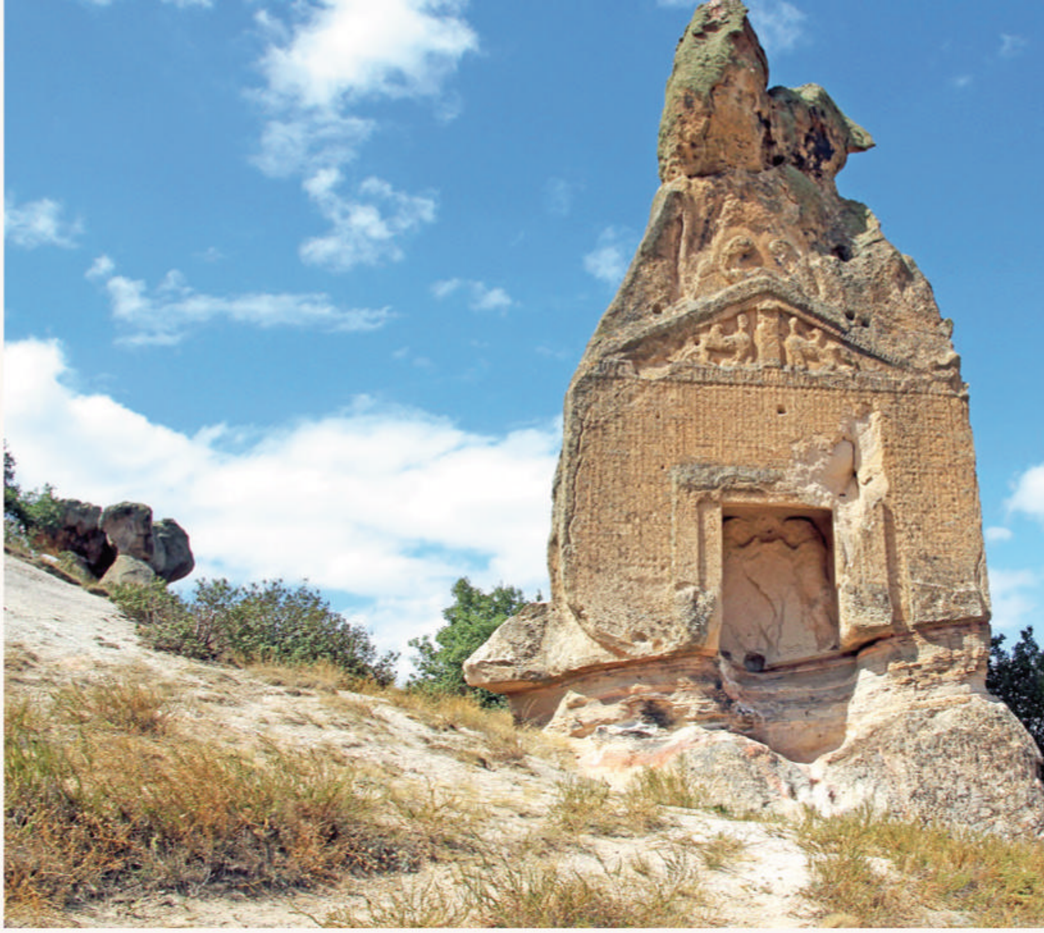

695 BC, when Phrygia became a vassal of the Kingdom of Lydia. Munn explained that Materan was affectionately known as ‘the Mother’ by the Phrygians. Her following extended across ancient cultures, including the Greeks, who recognized her as the ‘Mother of the Gods’, and the Romans, who called her Magna Mater (‘Great Mother’).

Through photography and meticulous analysis, Munn captured the inscription during optimal lighting conditions, noting the importance of light quality in revealing the text. The paper by Mark Munn, entitled “The Phrygian inscription W-03 on the Arslan Kaya monument”, is published in *Kadmos* 63 (2024). However, the originality of the author’s claim has been questioned by other academics who cite scholars of the nineteenth century who articulated the same interpretation.

(Top) The monument known as Arslan Kaya, meaning 'lion rock', decorated with reliefs of lions and sphinxes. A new translation of the monument's inscription has recently been proposed, linking it to the Phrygian goddess Materan, who was adopted as Magna Mater by the Romans.

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(Bottom) A relief of the the Phrygian Mother goddess Matar, dated to the seventh century BC.

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Psychotropic substances identified in an Egyptian vase

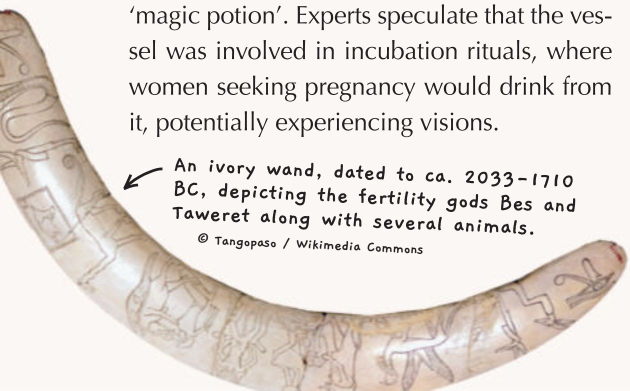
Branko van Oppen de Ruiter, curator of Greek and Roman exhibits at the Tampa Museum of Art, Florida, noticed a cup featuring the face of Bes was similar to a cup or vase in the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam.

Analysis of the cup identified residue from two hallucinogenic plants, Syrian Rue (*Peganum harmala*) and Blue Water Lily (*Nimphaea nouchali* var. *caerulea*), alongside traces of a fermented alcoholic drink flavoured with pine nuts, honey, and liquorice. Notably, the cup also contained human bodily fluids, including breast milk and blood, suggesting its use as a ‘magic potion’. Experts speculate that the vessel was involved in incubation rituals, where women seeking pregnancy would drink from it, potentially experiencing visions.

The discovery provides the first chemical evidence of psychotropic substances being ingested by ancient Egyptians, possibly as part of fertility rites to Bes, a god associated with fertility and revelry. By the Ptolemaic Period (ca. 330–30 BC), so-called Bes Chambers were built at the site of Saqqara near the Egyptian capital Memphis (south of Cairo).

Emphasizing the dangers of childbirth in antiquity, Dr van Oppen suggests that people may have turned to Bes for assistance by taking this concoction, which could serve as a bridge between the spiritual and the physical realms.

The open access article, entitled “Multianalytical investigation reveals psychotropic substances in a ptolemaic Egyptian vase”, is published in *Scientific Reports* 14 (2024).



An ivory wand, dated to ca. 2033–1710 BC, depicting the fertility gods Bes and Taweret along with several animals.

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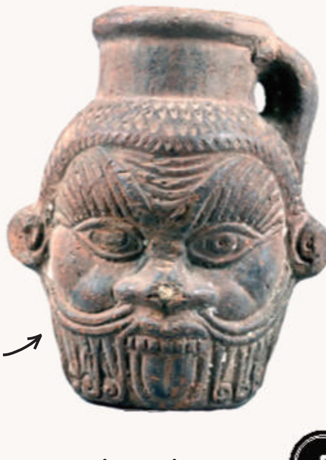
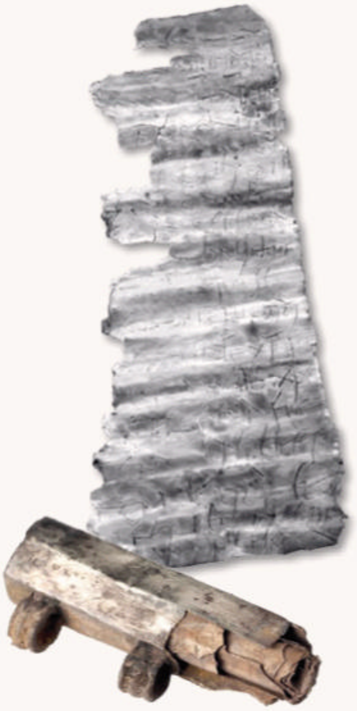


The second-century-BC mug, fashioned as the head of the god Bes, within which traces of hallucinogenic plants have been found.

© Tampa Museum of Art



The silver amulet discovered in Frankfurt, Germany. Dated to ca. AD 230-260, it contains a roll of silver foil inscribed with a poem in Latin, which archaeologists have been able to digitally unfurl. Together, they represent the earliest evidence for Christianity north of the Alps.

© (Top) LEIZA; (Bottom) Archäologisches Museum Frankfurt

Earliest Christian inscription north of the Alps discovered in Frankfurt

A remarkable archaeological discovery in Frankfurt, Germany, has unveiled a small silver amulet, measuring just 3.5 cm, known as the 'Frankfurt Silver Inscription'. Deciphered using computer tomography (CT) to create a 3D model, the text that can now be interpreted entirely in Christian terms – an extraordinary find for its time.

The amulet was discovered in the Heilmannstraße cemetery, part of the ancient Roman city of Nida. Excavations revealed 127 graves there, predominantly inhumations, and uncovered various unusual grave goods, including glass and jewellery, indicating a connection to high-quality burials typical of Roman urban centres.

The silver amulet, found in the grave of a 35-45-year-old man, contained the rolled silver foil with an inscription, which ran to eighteen lines in Latin, that reads:

> *"(In the name?) of St Titus. Holy, holy, holy! In the name of Jesus Christ, Son of God! The Lord of the world resists [to the best of his ability?] all attacks(?)/setbacks(?). The God(?) grants the well-being entry. This means of salvation(?) protects the person who surrenders to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, since before Jesus Christ all knees bow to Jesus Christ: the heavenly the earthly and the subterranean, and every tongue confess (to Jesus Christ)."*

Dating to ca. AD 230–260, the amulet represents the earliest authentic evidence of Christianity found north of the Alps. While there are historical references to early Christian groups in Gaul and Upper Germania, incontrovertible evidence of Christian life in northern Alpine regions generally only appears from the fourth century AD.

Roman bronze statuettes recovered at Reims

While conducting an excavation prior to the construction of a new residence in Reims, France, archaeologists from Inrap unearthed a *domus*, an opulent urban dwelling dating back to the Gallo-Roman period. The layout of Durocortorum, ancient Gallo-Roman Reims, adheres to traditional Roman urban planning, featuring residential blocks (*insulae*) separated by streets arranged in a grid pattern around the *forum*, which served as the political and religious hub of the city. The newly discovered *domus* is situated on the western edge of the

2500-year-old shipwreck located off Sicily

A shipwreck, dating back to the sixth to fifth centuries BC, has been discovered off the coast of Sicily. The 2500-year-old wreck was found near the town of Ispica, in the waters of Santa Maria del Focallo, by archaeologists conducting an underwater excavation project. The sea around the island was treacherous to ancient commercial ships and their crews. Several wrecks have been identified.

The ship's hull, uncovered after being buried under sand and rocks, was built using an 'on-the-shell' construction technique, an early method of shipbuilding common in Mediterranean cultures. Using photogrammetry techniques, archaeologists have created a 3D model of the wreck and are conducting analyses on the materials found, hoping to better understand the ship's construction and its historical context.

Several anchors from distinct periods were found near the wreck, attesting to the importance of the site for maritime travel throughout history. They included: two iron anchors, shaped like an upside-down 'T', believed to date from the seventh century AD, and four heavy stone anchors, which are thought to originate from the prehistoric era.

© University of Udine

An archaeologist excavating the shipwreck. Dated to the sixth or fifth century BC, it was found off the coast of Sicily in the waters of Santa Maria del Focallo.

The excavation was part of the Kaukana Project, which is surveying the ancient site "for underwater cultural heritage and [to] reconstruct Kaukana's relationship with the rest of the Mediterranean". Several landings and coastal shelters delineate the Graeco-Roman site of Kaukana, which was connected to trade routes between the east, Tripoli, Egypt, Rome, Malta, and Sicily.

A lead anchor stock found in the waters off Cape Zafferano, Porticello. Dated to the late fourth to second centuries BC, it is inscribed with the word 'Heracles'.

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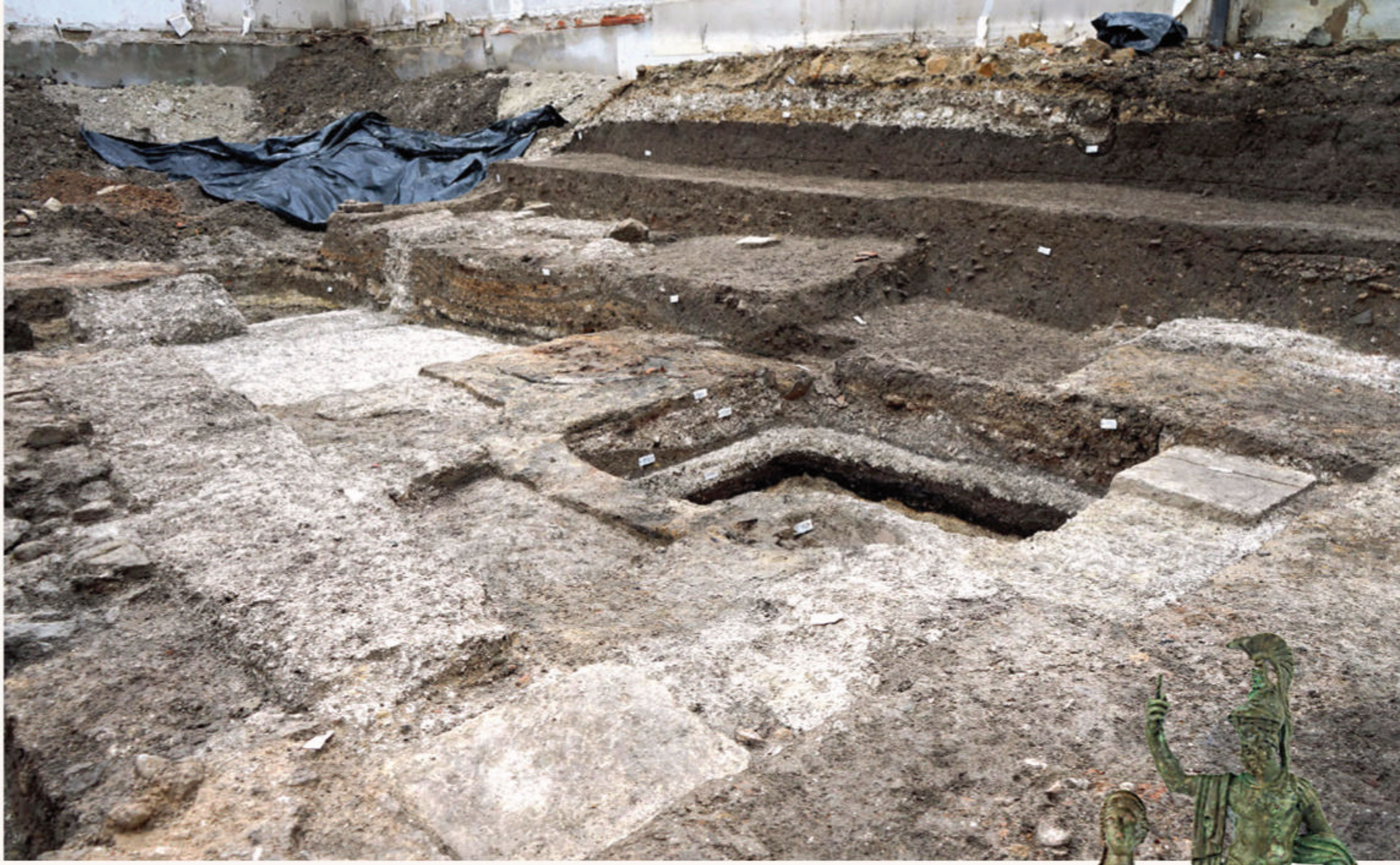
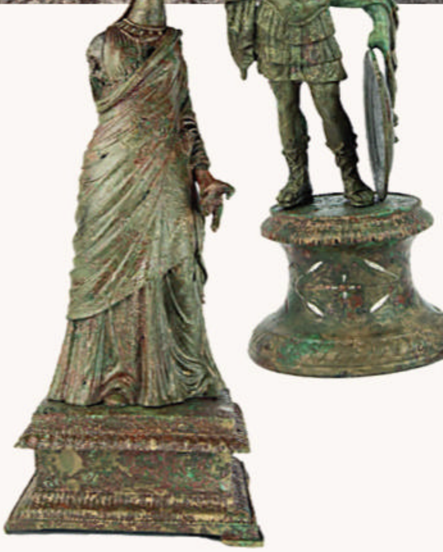


city, over a kilometre away from the *forum*, in a damp area between the *decumanus maximus* and the Vesle, the main watercourse that crosses Reims. Dating back to the second century AD, the *domus* boasts a grand façade supported by two large pillars.

Three finely cast bronze statuettes were discovered within a demolition layer, likely the result of a fire. The exquisite craftsmanship of the statuettes of Mars (18 cm tall), a goddess (30.7 cm), and a bull (11.6 cm) include silver-enhanced features and elaborate decorations that further emphasize their high status.

The statuettes were found alongside remnants of a fresco depicting a megalography (heroic figures represented in life size), including two characters labelled Achilles and Deidamia, referring to the mythological scene of Achilles on Scyros. This episode preceding the Trojan War was prized in Rome; its presence in Reims testifies to its adoption by the elites in the provincial capital of Gaul Belgica. Only four painted representations of this scene are known from the ancient world – in Aquileia, Pompeii, Rome, and now Reims.



(Top) **The excavated entrance area of the *domus*, dated to the Gallo-Roman period, that was discovered in Reims. The building was richly decorated with frescoes and other works of art, including two bronze statuettes.**

© Jean-Jacques Bigot, Inrap

(Bottom) **Two bronze statuettes recently discovered in the remains of a Gallo-Roman *domus* in Reims. The statuette on the right is believed to be Mars, but the statuette on the left has not yet been identified.**

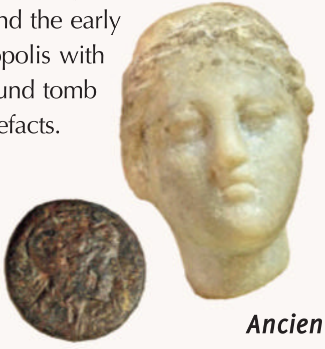
© Renaud Bernadet, Inrap

Finds linked to Cleopatra discovered at Taposiris Magna

Archaeologists on the quest to find the lost tomb of Cleopatra VII at the Temple of Taposiris Magna, Egypt, have been encouraged by finds from the late Ptolemaic period.

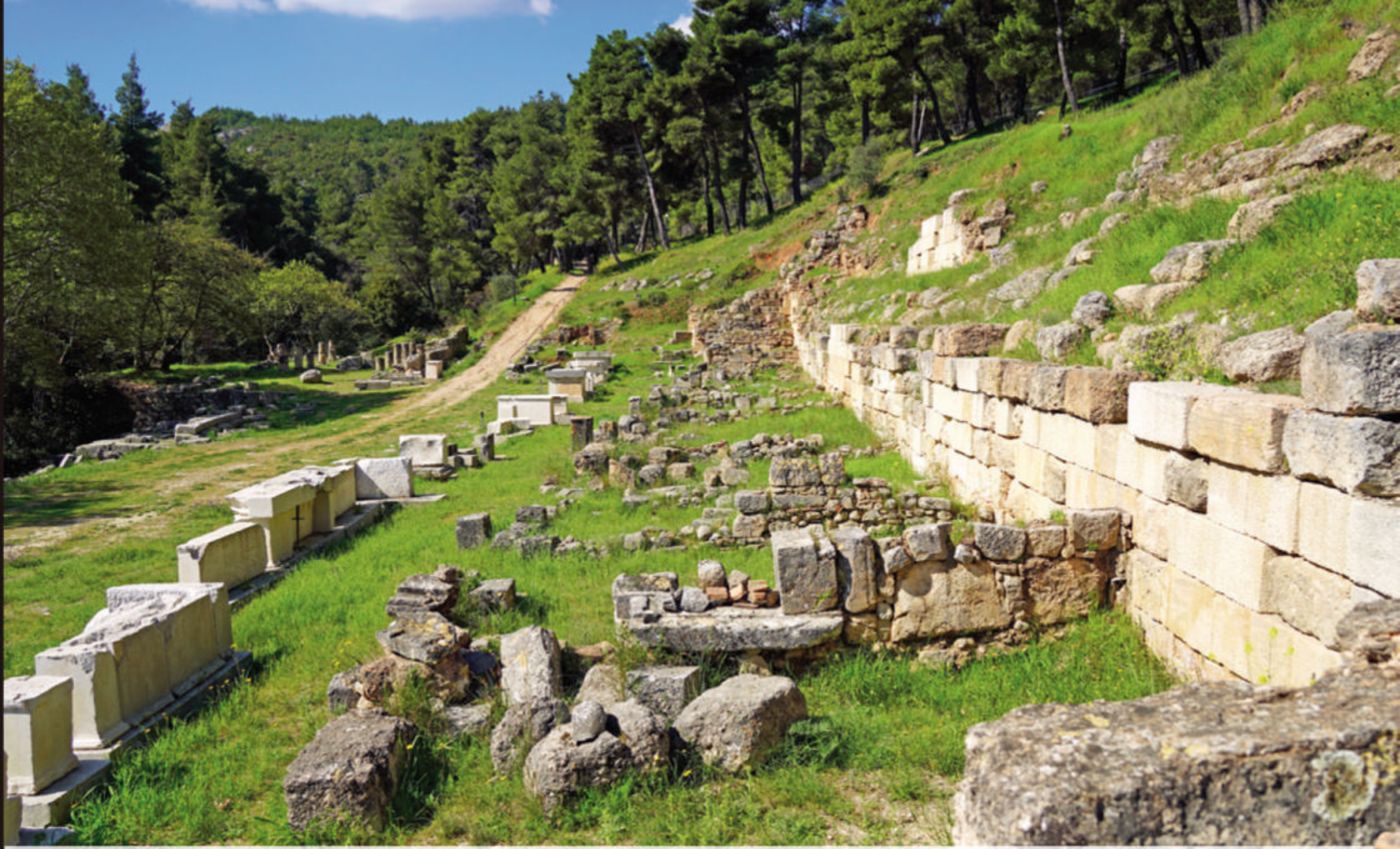
The most recent archaeological mission revealed foundation deposits beneath its southern wall. One remarkable find is a small white marble statue of a woman wearing the royal diadem, which has been speculated to represent Cleopatra VII. However, some archaeologists have noted facial differences that may indicate it depicts another royal figure entirely. Another remarkable artefact is a limestone bust of a king, adorned with the pharaohs' ceremonial headdress, known as the Nemes.

Additionally, the excavation uncovered 337 coins, many featuring the image of Cleopatra VII, as well as ceremonial pottery vessels, oil lamps, bronze statuettes, and a scarab amulet inscribed with the phrase "The justice of Ra has arisen". A bronze ring dedicated to the goddess Hathor was also recovered, while ceramic fragments confirm the temple's construction dates to the first century BC. The mission also uncovered a Greek temple from the fourth century BC, which was destroyed between the second century BC and the early Roman period. Nearby, a necropolis with 20 catacombs and an underground tomb was found, yielding yet more artefacts.



A marble bust and a coin depicting a woman's head, both recently discovered at Taposiris Magna. The head is believed to represent Cleopatra VII.

© Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities



The Amphiaraos sanctuary at Oropos was an extensive complex with temples and ancillary buildings. The Amphiareion was controlled by several *poleis* over the centuries, with each contributing new buildings to the sanctuary complex.

A LITTLE FROG IN A BIG POND?

OROPOS AND THE AMPHIAREION

By Roy van Wijk

How to survive and remain independent when surrounded by bigger and stronger neighbours? It must have been a question on the minds of leaders of every small *polis* in the ancient Greek mainland. Bigger powers inevitably controlled their fates, for instance, through sheer force or influencing their leaders. Oropos was no different in that respect. Located in the eastern fringes of central Greece, its political fate was unwillingly determined by its geography and the three larger neighbours surrounding it.

Just across the Euboean Strait from Oropos there was Eretria, who, according to the third-century historian Nicocrates, had founded Oropos (*FGrH* 376 F1). Traces of this relationship have been found in the linguistic legacy of the town; Oropos is the Eretrian version of the river Asopos that flowed through Boeotia. To its south there was Athens, its inhabitants always enviously peeking across the ridges of Mount Parnes. To its west, there were the Boeotians, the Thebans first and foremost.

The Eleusinian First Fruits Decree, dated to 422 BC, records the offerings to be given by the various Attic demes and other territories (including Oropos) that were controlled by Athens to the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis.

© TimeTravelRome / Wikimedia Commons

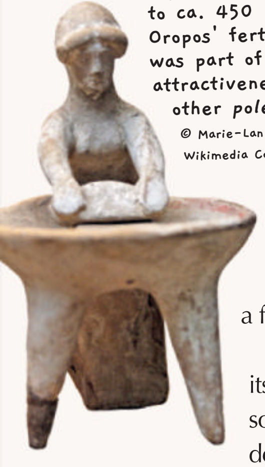
A volatile history

The political history of Oropos can be summarized in one word: volatile. Between the mid-sixth century and the early third century BC, control over the region swapped between the Athenians, Eretrians, Boeotians and, rarely, the Oropians a staggering eleven times. Sometimes these changes were the result of external interference, like a Macedonian king, such as Alexander III or Demetrius the Besieger, deciding it was time to reward their supporters, such as Athens, by granting them the Oropia (the territory of Oropos). On other occasions, it occurred because groups vying for influence *in* Oropos requested help from leaders in Athens, Thebes, or Eretria.

However, its geographical insecurity alone cannot explain the desirability of the Oropia by these neighbours, unless we assume a very cynical approach to the political interactions of the ancient Greek mainland. One part of the answer

© TimeTravelRome / Wikimedia Commons

lies in the fertile soil of the Oropia. A fourth-century inscription from Eleusis provides more insights. The First Fruits Decree, dated to 329/8 BC, deals with the offerings given to Demeter and Kore at the Sanctuary of Eleusis in honour of their gift to mankind: agriculture. Each of the Athenian tribes sent a tithe of their annual harvest, as did areas controlled by the Athenians but that did not belong to these tribes. What is so striking about the numbers recorded in the inventory is that the amount produced by all the Attic tribes pales in comparison to that from the non-deme participants, such as Oropos. That holds particularly true for the cherished foodstuff, wheat, where the contributions from non-demes outnumber the demes almost five to one. In a world plagued by precarious grain supplies, possession of such a fertile territory was enviable.



A Greek terracotta sculpture of a woman grinding grain, dated to ca. 450 BC. Oropos' fertility was part of its attractiveness to other *poleis*.

© Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons

Grain alone does not explain its appeal, however. The hills in south-western Oropia, on the borders with Attica, were thickly covered with pine forest. The trees were valuable for charcoal, among other things, but more particularly, it was the pitch derived from its resin, or 'conifer tar', that elevated the importance of these forests. The value of this good lies in its qualities for preservation, especially when combined with beeswax. Conifer tar was used for wine preservation, construction, and most importantly in this context, shipbuilding. Beekeeping was also one of the economic activities conducted in these hills. Together, they brought significant wealth to Oropos and offered anyone who controlled the region access to valuable resources, of which only a limited amount was available in central Greece. Maintaining the fleet of Athens would have required vast pine forests, which happened to exist right on their doorstep. Perhaps it is also no coincidence that the Thebans decided to launch a naval expedition against Athenians in the mid-360s *after* their capture of Oropos in 366 BC (Aeschines, 3.85; Xenophon, *Hellenica* 7.4.1; Diodorus, 15.76.1; Plutarch, *Phocion* 9.4).

A final element factoring into the appeal of the Oropia was its shrine, the Amphiareion. This was a renowned healing shrine, dedicated to the Argive hero Amphiaraos, who had fought against Thebes in the *Seven Against Thebes* saga. An early fourth-century decree, set up at the Amphiareion, provides an insight into the economic benefits that control of the sanctuary could entail. Visitors were "to pay nine obols to obtain a cure from the god". This would have taken place via incubation, which involved spending the night at the sanctuary, lying down with hopes of obtaining a cure from the god during his nightly visit. Moreover, "people trespassing the rules were required to deposit up to five drachmas", roughly three-and-a-half times what a cure costs. An even more profitable part of the sanctuary's income came from the skins of the sacrificial animals. These skins were de-

A Campanian red-figure vase, dated to ca. 340 BC, depicting part of the saga of the Seven Against Thebes. Amphiaraos participated in the Argive attack on Thebes. Dying in the process, he was swallowed up by the earth, with his body reappearing Oropos.

© The J. Paul Getty Museum

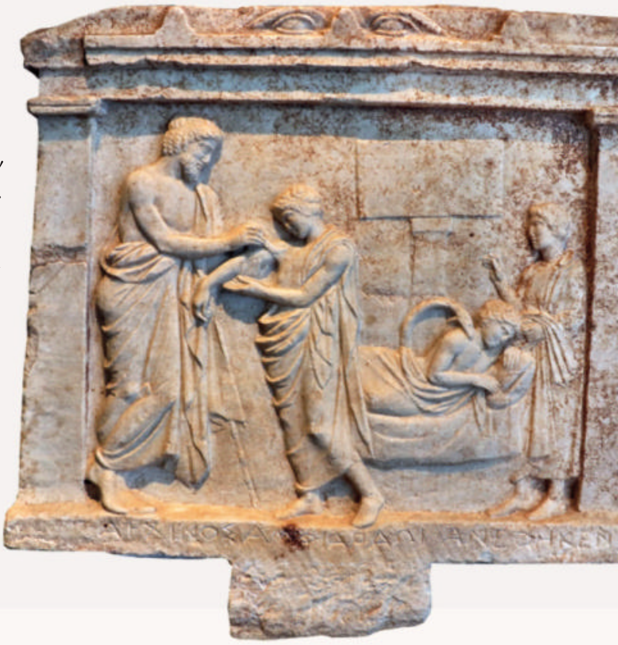
A marble votive relief, dated to ca. 400-350 BC, discovered at the Amphiareion, depicting an incubation ritual. At the sanctuary of Amphiaraos at Oropos, people could seek healing or oracular pronouncements through dreams.

© George E. Koronaios / Wikimedia Commons

Sweet dreams

While, much like at the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus, visitors to the Amphiareion would sleep at the sanctuary to be cured by Amphiaraos, they could also sleep there to receive oracular dreams. Herodotus, for example, records how, on behalf of the Mardonius, a man called Mys bribed someone to sleep in the sanctuary of Amphiaraos in order to receive an oracular response (8.133–134).

A notable event concerning the oracle at the Amphiareion occurred in the late fourth century BC, after the Oropia had been returned to Athenian control, likely by Alexander III. Athens sent three men to the Amphiareion to ask for the god's help in resolving a property dispute. Five hills in the Oropia had been divided into lots, with the lots to be shared amongst the ten Athenian tribes, yet one hill was said to belong to the god and was, therefore, unlawfully divided. One member of this embassy, Euxenippus, was later brought to trial "because of the dreams which he claims to have had" (Hyperides, 4.3). Polyeuctus, the prosecutor, claimed that Euxenippus "misrepresented the god and ... made a false report to the people" on behalf of people who had bribed him (Hyperides, 4.15).



Dating to the first century BC, this stopper for an amphora has been fashioned from a pinecone. The resin from Oropos' pine forests was a valuable commodity used in many industries, including wine preservation.

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Statue B of the Riace Bronzes, two life-size bronze statues found off the coast of Calabria, dated to ca. 460-450 BC. Statue B possibly depicts Amphiaraos.

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clared *hierea* ('sacred'), meaning they became property of the god and his sanctuary. The skins could be sold on to craftsmen, providing another source of income for the shrine. Could it be that the fees payable at the sanctuary prompted Heraclides Criticus to quip that "greed resides in Oropos" (*BNJ* 369A)? Whatever caused him to write these words, is impossible to establish. Yet it seems that controlling the sanctuary brought economic benefits.

A mirror for interstate relations

The Amphiareion was, of course, more than just a money-making machine for external powers to control, it was also the main sanctuary of the Oropians. Some ancient authors even view it as the *only* interesting part of the city. According to the second-century-AD writer Pausanias, "The city is on the coast and affords nothing remarkable to record" (1.34.1), before mentioning the distance between the town and the sanctuary: some 6 km south-east of Oropos. His damning indictment of Oropos notwithstanding, the ancient traveller does grant them one claim to fame. "The Oropians were the first to worship Amphiaraos as a god and from there the Greeks received his cult" (Pausanias, 1.34.2). It lifts the veil somewhat on the special place the cult occupied in the local landscape since they viewed themselves as the first to worship the hero Amphiaraos as a god. For Pausanias to record and support that idea shows how for the locals the cult set them apart from other cities and people in Greece.

The fourth and third centuries BC witnessed an increase in the popularity of the cult. One indication thereof is the repeated investment in the cult's infrastructure. During these two centuries, a new temple was built to replace the older, smaller temple; sleeping quarters for visitors were constructed; and a new fountain was set up. Other works were dedicated to the water supply, such as the fountains and the drainage areas in the sanctuary. Many of these additions were made under Athenian supervision. The most impressive architectural feature, however, is the stoa constructed by the Thebans in the mid-fourth century BC, when Oropos was under Boeotian rule. The existing remnants still give an impression of the scale of the work and how it affected the sanctuary's lay-out, since it would have been the first building visitors encountered upon entering the sanctuary. Another indication of the sanctuary's growing popularity was the decision to erect a decree in the earlier fourth-century when Oropos was independent. It stipulated the rules of the sanctuary, for "citizens (*demotes*) and foreigners (*xenon*)" alike. Another example is the re-organization of the festival dedicated to Amphiaraos, the Amphiareia, that attracted competitors from all over the Greek world, as victory lists from the late fourth century BC show and dedications of the *apobates* ritual, where a hoplite would jump on and off a racing chariot.

The influx of additional visitors and the centrality of the sanctuary to the Oropians as its

The *other* true place of divination

The interior of a *kylix* depicting the Athenian king Ageus consulting the Pythian oracle at Delphi. In Herodotus' account of Croesus' reign, the Amphiareion was the only oracle, besides Delphi, to give the correct answer to the Lydian king's question.

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The most famous oracle from the ancient Greek world is, without a doubt, the Pythian oracle at Delphi. In Herodotus' *Histories*, the primacy of the Delphic oracle is confirmed in a story about king Croesus of Lydia. Faced with the possibility of war with the growing Achaemenid Empire, Croesus turned to various oracles in order to determine whether he should go to war with them or not. He sent envoys throughout the eastern Mediterranean to determine which oracle was worth consulting. 100 days after leaving, they were told to ask the oracles what Croesus was doing at that moment – boiling tortoise and lamb in a bronze cauldron – and bring back the responses. Upon learning that the Delphic oracle was correct, Croesus thought Delphi "the only true place of divination", at least, according to Herodotus (1.48).

Just after this statement, however, Herodotus goes on to tell how, while he does not know the specific answer, the oracle of Amphiaraos was also correct (1.49). According to a recently-published inscription from the temple of Apollo Ismenios in Thebes, originally inscribed in the late sixth century BC with Boeotian script, Croesus had dedicated a golden shield at Oropos. The shield, which was supposedly stolen from the Oropian sanctuary, was recovered by the Theban priest of Apollo Ismenios, effectively a thinly-veiled claim to control of the Oropia.

A Hellenistic gold wreath of laurel leaves and berries, dated to ca. 300-100 BC. In the fourth century BC, the Athenians, unusually, decided to crown Amphiaraos, a practice normally reserved for mortals.

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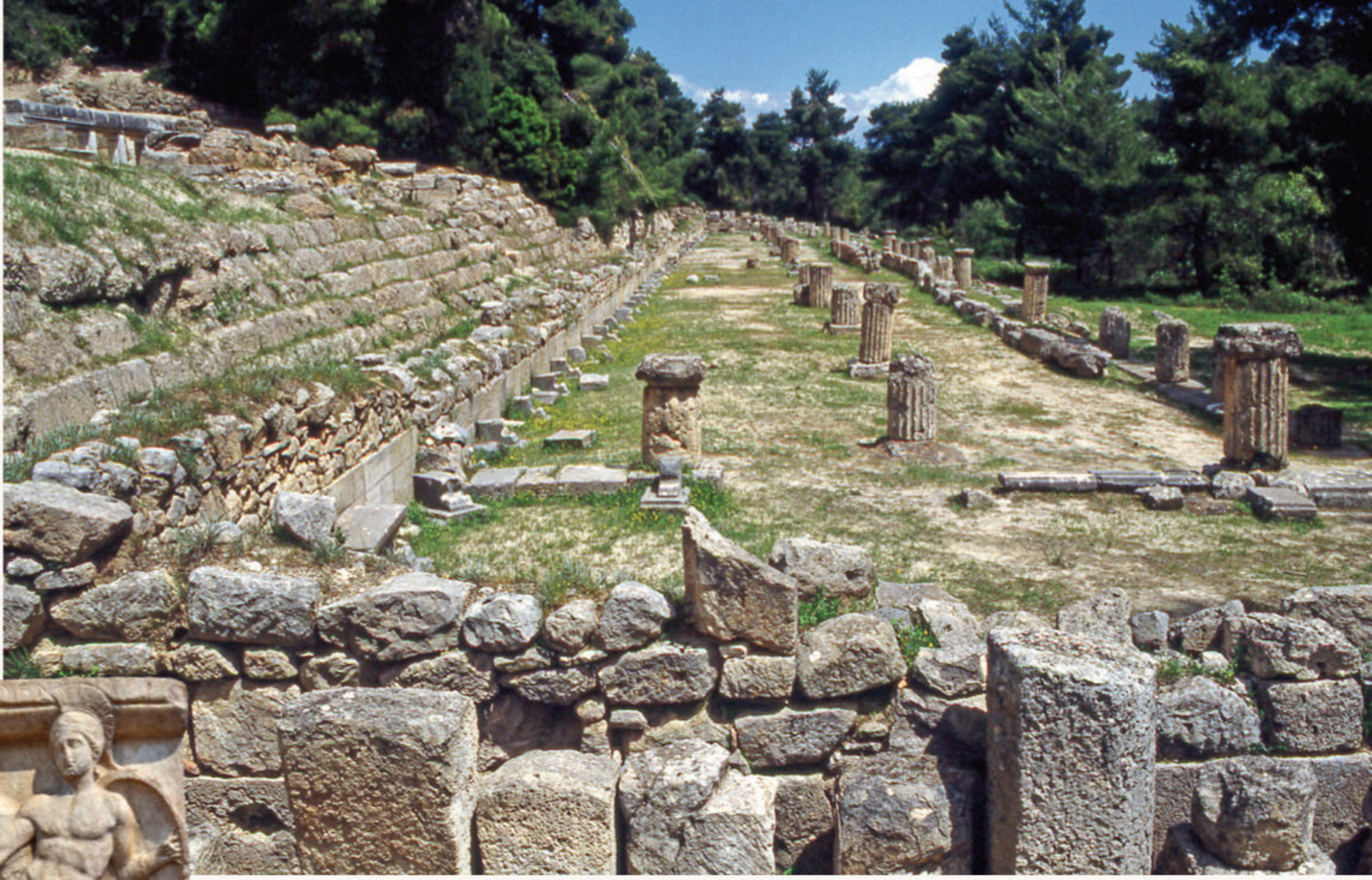

The remains of the *stoa* at the sanctuary of Amphiaraos, one of the most spectacular ruins from the site. The stoa was built by Thebes in the fourth century BC, when the sanctuary was under the control of the Boeotian League.

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A fragment of a relief, dated to the end of the fifth century BC, depicting a man leaping either into or out of a chariot as part of an apobates event, which was a notable event held at the Amphiareion.

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main religious centre by itself are not enough to assume the importance of the sanctuary for interstate relations. However, there is evidence of a back-and-forth interaction between the dominating parties at the sanctuary. This is already highlighted by the above-mentioned law that was set up in the sanctuary. What's interesting is the Athenian response. Initially, these were smaller jabs, such as the honours for Athenian officials in the 360s BC, which indicate that the sanctuary was now treated like an Athenian sanctuary. A stronger response came some decades later. After the Athenians took control of the Oropia again in 335/4 BC, courtesy of the Macedonian king Alexander III, they decided to crown Amphiaraos and make a grand statement of it at the Amphiareion. The practice of crowning individuals in fourth-century Athens was not exceptional. One only has to think of Demosthenes' famous speech *On the Crown* to know of its occurrence. Crowning a god, however, was unprecedented. That the Athenians chose to crown Amphiaraos, the god of the Oropians, and erect the decree honouring him at the Amphiareion was, therefore, a clear signal: the Amphiareion was now Athenian. The repeated distinctions between 'Athenians' and 'others' at the sanctuary in the decree cement that idea. It is tempting to view this as solely aimed at the Oropians, who were now perceived as 'others' at their own sanctuary. Showcasing Athenian dominance was also aimed at the other interested parties in Oropos, however, such as the Boeotian League or the Eretrians, groups that had continuously vied for control over the town and its sanctuary. That it came after a long period of Boeotian control and an independent Oropian interlude would have amplified the effects thereof.

These examples offer but a brief glimpse of how the sanctuary became an avenue for showcasing control over this desired region and stress how the local history of mainland Greece can be recovered, even through the eyes of its dominators. AH

Roy van Wijk is currently a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Trento as part of the Federalism and Border Management in Antiquity (FeBo) project.

A stele, dated to ca. 200 BC, recording the Decree of the Amphiaraistai, an agreement to repair the temple of Amphiaraos in the Attic deme of Rhamnous. While others did worship Amphiaraos, the people of Oropos claimed to have been the first to do so.

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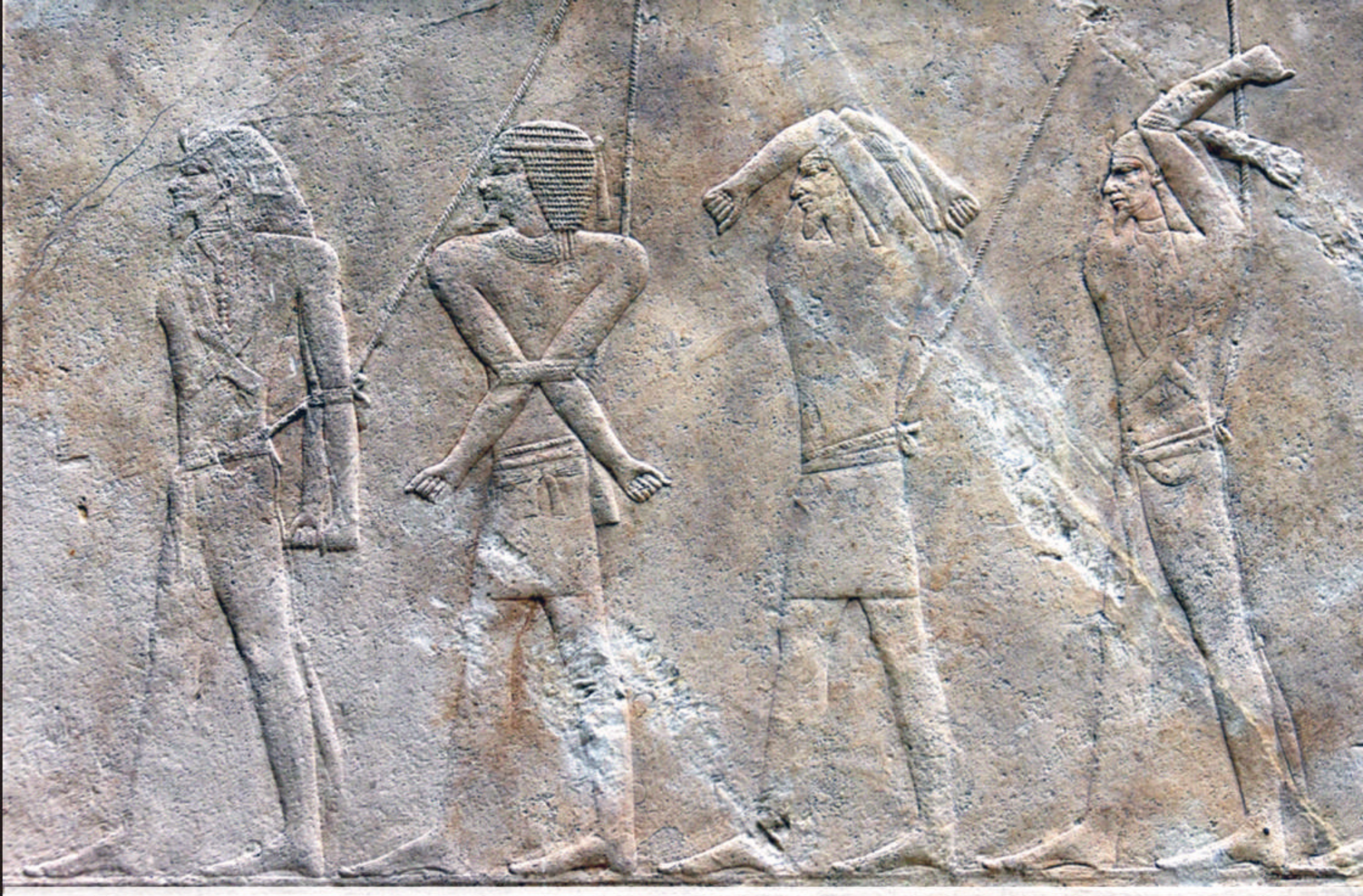

A relief from the mortuary temple of the pyramid complex of the Fifth-Dynasty king Sahure, who ruled ca. 2496-2483 BC. It depicts Libyan, Nubian, and West Asiatic captives. During Sahure's reign, Egyptian exploitation of Lower Nubia increased.

EARLY EGYPTIAN RELATIONS WITH SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

By Gregory Mumford

TRADE, WAR, AND DIPLOMACY

The people, cultures, and polities of ancient Egypt and Nubia interacted extensively, ranging from peaceful to hostile relations. Lower Nubia offered desirable resources, plus riverine and overland access to sub-Saharan commodities, including fauna, flora, metals, stone, precious and semi-precious stones, and labour. From as early as the Pre-Dynastic Period in Egypt, people travelled along the Nile Valley, transporting various goods.

The broader, fertile Egyptian flood plain, with rich faunal, floral, and mineral resources, and a navigable river between Aswan and the Mediterranean, fostered a larger, wealthier, and more stable population and a unified state. The narrower, stonier, and less agriculturally rich flood plain in Nubia, on the other hand, inhibited the development of a larger state, and the region was divided between several tribal groups that were the weaker partners in any interactions with Egypt.

Predynastic period (3500–3000 BC)

As early as the late Predynastic period, there were cross-cultural interactions between Egypt and Nubia, incorporating overland, riverine, and possibly Red Sea routes, comprised of Egyptian, Nubian, and other traders, emissaries, and migrants. Unlike later regional interactions, these early interactions were relatively even and informal. In southern Egypt, an expanding kingdom (based at Abydos, Naqada, and Hierakonpolis) increasingly interacted with A Group culture groups in Lower Nubia (northern Sudan). An incense burner from an elite tomb at Qustul, the site of a local affluent chiefdom, depicting a 'Dynasty 0' Egyptian ruler seated in a ship may reflect state-level interactions. Egypt's southern border at Elephantine and the First Cataract appears to be fairly porous at

An incense burner, dated to ca. 3200-3000 BC, from Qustul, a site associated with the A Group culture. People and goods travelled up and down the Nile Valley even before the the Kingdom of Egypt existed.

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A label made of ebony, also known as African blackwood, a trade resource from the southern regions of the Nile Valley. It mentions an official visit of pharaoh Hor-Aha, active in the mid-31st century BC, to two of the most important shrines of the Western Delta.

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DID YOU KNOW?

As we lack any texts or primary settlements for early Nubian culture groups, the Egyptologist George A. Reisner labelled the different phases A, B, and C in the early twentieth century. The A Group flourished from the fourth millennium BC to ca. 2900 BC, and the C Group flourished from ca. 2400–1550 BC. The B Group culture, which was previously thought to have flourished in the final centuries of the A Group, has since been identified as being part of the A Group.

this time. For instance, the pharaonic appellation Ta-Seti ('Land of the Bow') designated both southernmost Egypt and Lower Nubia, while A Group Nubians and their pottery are attested in southern Egypt, as at the Predynastic cemetery at Kubanieh, for example.

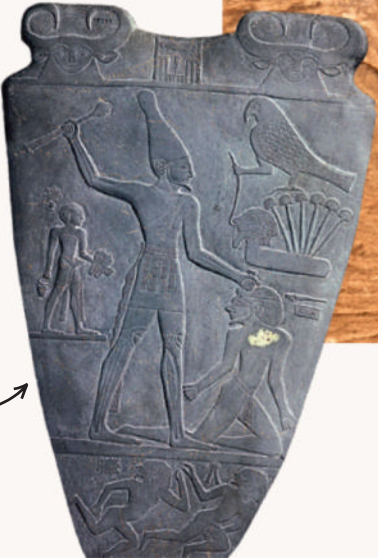
Egyptian exports to Lower Nubia at this time include pottery containers, Naqada II–III stone jars, slate palettes, jewellery, copper tools, and weaponry. These items may represent gifts, trade, and some Nubian emulation of Egyptian products and motifs in elite settings, catering to prominent chiefdoms and tribal groups in Lower Nubia, presumably securing both local interactions and commodities from sub-Saharan Africa. Imports from Lower Nubia to Egypt include African Blackwood ('ebony'), ivory, and more perishable items (e.g. animal hides), while sub-Saharan Africa supplied castor beans, aromatics, obsidian, and other exotica.

An ivory comb, dated to the Late Naqada I to Naqada II periods (ca. 3900–3500 BC), depicting a giraffe.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Early Dynastic period (3000–2700 BC)

King Narmer's unification of Egypt, ca. 3000 BC, altered the nature of Egypt's relations with Nubia. Elephantine was fortified and expeditions into Lower Nubia became more frequent, often incorporating military activity and aimed at retrieving captives. These ventures may have depleted and dispersed most of the A Group settlements along the flood plain in Lower Nubia. For example, commodity dockets portray king Aha dispatching troops against Ta-Seti, and an Egyptian rock text assigned to king Djer at Gebel Sheikh Suliman, at the Second Cataract, depicts a ship, slain enemies, and a bound prisoner with the glyph Ta-Seti, commemorating the southernmost extent of his military subjugation. Almost 300 years later, a stele from Hierakonpolis mentions Khasekhemwy, a king of late Second Dynasty, defeating Ta-Seti, while other texts refer to him humiliating "the foreign lands". Egypt also intensified its direct exploitation and securing access to key resources in Lower Nubia, perhaps removing local resistance and rival intermediaries in the trade with southern Nubia. Gneiss, for example, was a popular material in Early Dynastic Egypt. While there is no direct evidence for Egyptian control of the gold mines in the eastern Nubian desert, an early Second



The front face of the so-called Narmer Palette, depicting Narmer, the king who created the united kingdom of Upper and Lower Egypt, smiting his enemies.

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(Top) Several pieces of pottery from the site of El-Kubanieh in southern Egypt, dated to ca. 3200-2780 BC. The southern reaches of the Kingdom of Egypt, particularly in the Old Kingdom, appear to have been relatively porous, with people travelling to and living there from both north and south.

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(Bottom) The relief from Gebel Sheikh Suleiman, dated to ca. 3000 BC, assumed to be from the reign of King Djer. It depicts a ship, slain enemies, and a bound prisoner with the glyph Ta-Seti. The relief possibly commemorates the southernmost of Djer's military conquests against the A Group culture.

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A jar, dated to the Late Naqada II period (ca. 3500–3300 BC), depicting a boat carrying human figures – possibly a reference to an important event.

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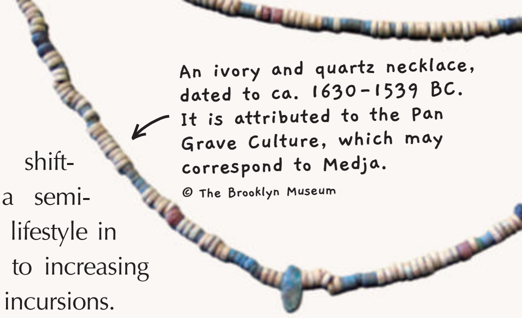

An ivory and quartz necklace, dated to ca. 1630–1539 BC. It is attributed to the Pan Grave Culture, which may correspond to Medja.

© The Brooklyn Museum

Dynasty expedition placed Nynetjer's name in a rock text at Gebel el-Girgawi, not far from access points into the gold mining region.

These campaigns can make it appear as though interactions along the Nile Valley were only violent, but the continuity of Egyptian imports, including linen, pottery, and cylinder seal impressions, implies some peaceful interactions. During the Second Dynasty, the dismantling of fortifications at Elephantine and their replacement with an expanded, non-fortified island settlement may reflect a reduced threat from the A Group population. Archaeological surveys have revealed, however, that indigenous settlements disappear entirely from the Lower Nubian flood plain by the end of the Third Dynasty, with the A Group population possibly shifting to a semi-nomadic lifestyle in response to increasing Egyptian incursions.

The Late Old Kingdom, ca. 2400-2200 BC, saw the resettlement of Lower Nubia by the C Group culture, leading to increased Egyptian expeditions to the region for various resources, such as gold, animal products, and aromatics.

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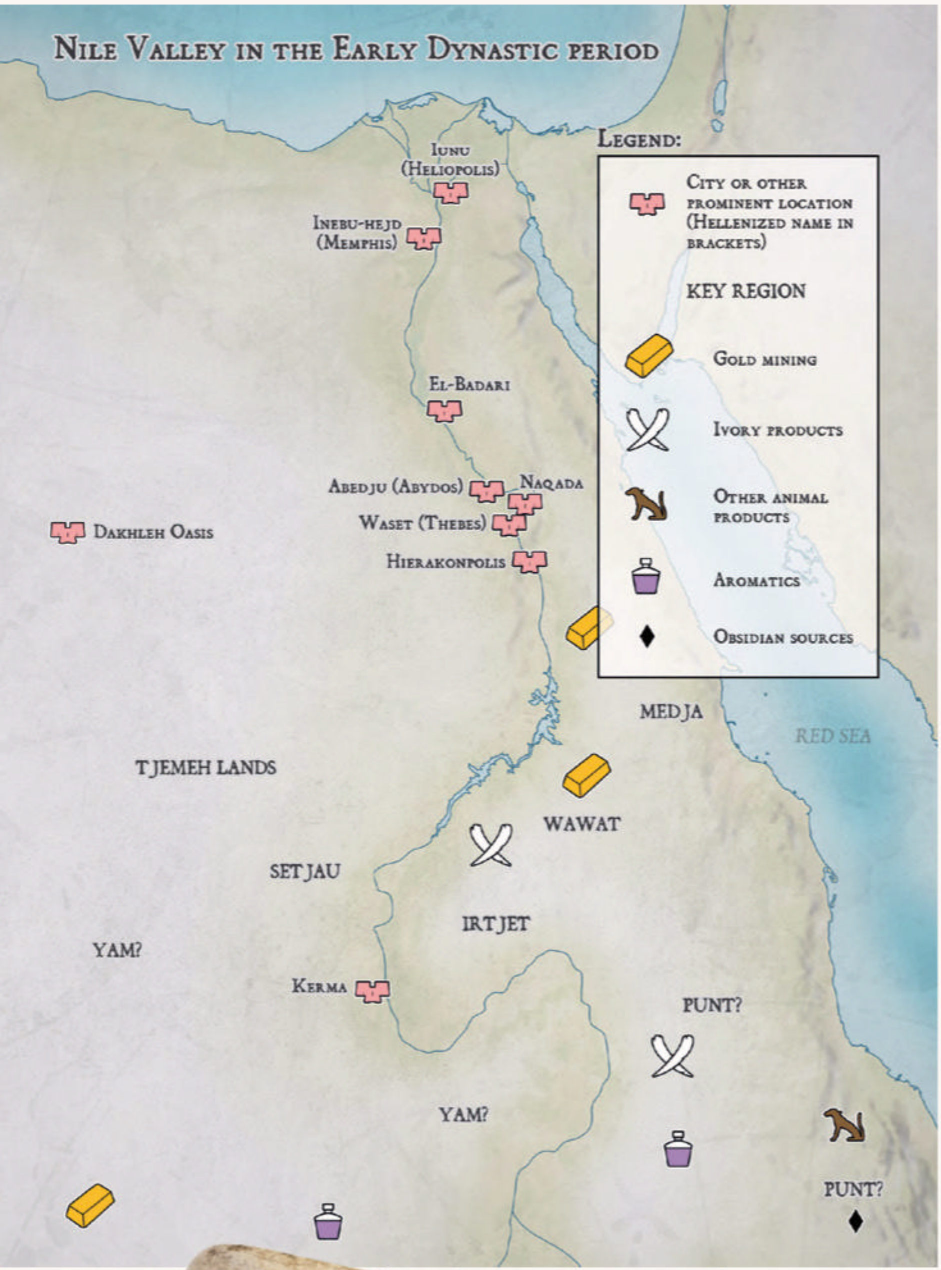

Early Old Kingdom (2700–2400 B.C.)

By the Third Dynasty, Egypt reached a pinnacle in its power, and intensified its presence in and domination over portions of Lower Nubia. Third Dynasty rock texts confirm kings Sekhemkhet and Sanakht sent mining missions to Tomas (200 km south of Aswan). According to the Palermo Stone, king Sneferu of the Fourth Dynasty sent a major expedition into Nubia, capturing 7000 men and women, plus 200,000 sheep and goats. Two rock texts from Khor el-Aquiba in Nubia's eastern desert, from either the Fourth or Fifth Dynasty, record two Egyptian officials bringing "20,000 men to hack up Wawat," and seizing "17,000 Nubians", perhaps reflecting Sneferu's campaign. The captives represent semi-nomadic desert tribes, who presumably resisted Egyptian incursions into and exploitation of their territory and resources. The mortuary complex of Sahure, a king of the Fifth Dynasty, alludes to extensive activity abroad, featuring smiting scenes and prisoners from Nubia and Libya. These references are augmented by the occurrence of his name in a rock text at Tomas, and on items at Gebel el-Asr and Kor (Buhen South), confirming Sahure's broad-scale exploitation of Lower Nubia.

Egypt's increased activity in Lower Nubia during the Fifth and Fourth Dynasties is demonstrated by much Old Kingdom pottery, plus royal names on statues, *stelae*, and other items, at the gneiss quarries of Gebel el-Asr. Gneiss from Gebel el-Asr was applied to many Old Kingdom containers in Egypt, plus statues of Khafre and Sahure. Additionally, the discovery of some Old Kingdom potsherds beneath a Middle Kingdom fort at Kuban may indicate earlier activity at a key Nile anchorage and base camp that facilitated access to the Wadi el-Allaqi gold mines.

By the early Fourth Dynasty, a permanent fortified settlement was established along the banks of the Nile at Kor, at the northern end of the Second Cataract. It features a 2-m-wide 'defensive' wall, a gateway, housing, administrative structures, storage buildings, animal

Two daggers with copper blades and bone hilts from Kerma, dated to ca. 1750–1450 BC.

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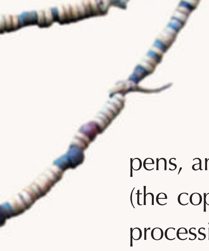
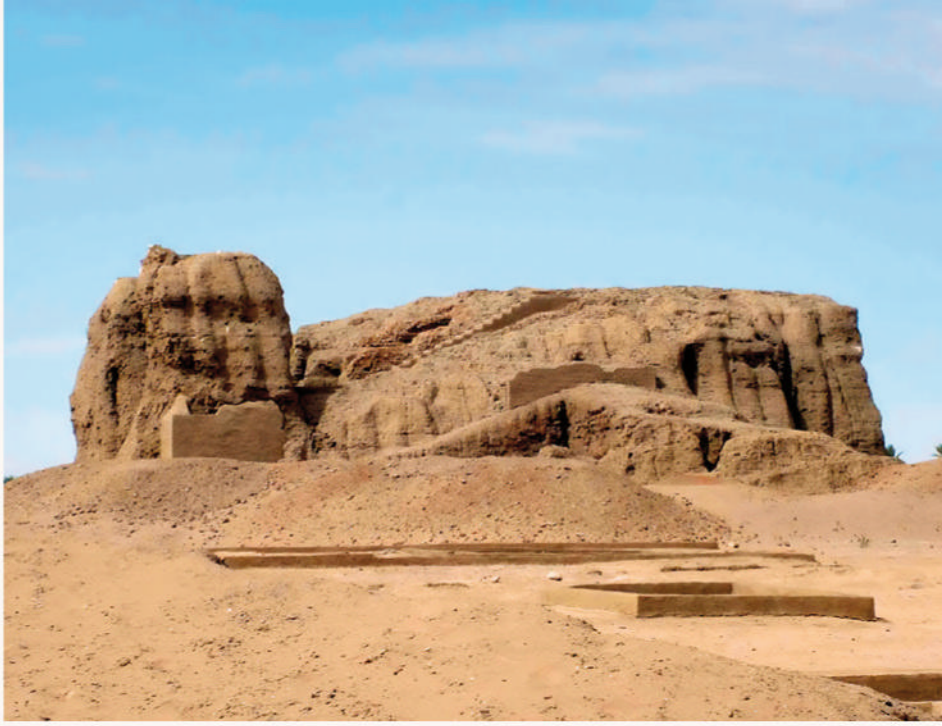


pens, and small-scale copper refining furnaces (the copper residue may be the result of gold processing). The settlement yielded Old Kingdom pottery, ingot moulds, and sealings dating to kings Khafre, Menkaure, Userkaf, Sahure, Neferirkare, and Niuserre. Some pottery may date to before the Old Kingdom, while other potsherds could extend into the late Fifth Dynasty. Kor also yielded some A Group pottery, suggesting it may overly an earlier A Group site, while the presence of C Group pottery indicates some interactions and/or trade with Upper Nubia, which may reflect one of Kor's prime functions as an otherwise isolated and substantial southern outpost.

Late Old Kingdom (2400–2200 BC)

By the late Fifth Dynasty, ca. 2400 BC, semi-nomadic pastoralists, known as C Group, had resettled much of Lower Nubia's flood plain, originating from Upper Nubia and perhaps the adjacent desert fringes. Some Sixth Dynasty texts describe several tribal groupings and territories in northern Nubia, such as Wawat, Irtjet, and Setju, each ruled by a chief ('Great One'). This resettlement coincides with, and may have encouraged, Egypt's abandonment of the installation at Kor, and a possible decline in quarrying at Gebel el-Asr. Quarrying continued at Tomas in the Sixth Dynasty, however, as attested by brief texts left there by Egyptian officials.

The resurgence of the Nubian C Group in the region, despite the abandonment of Kor, saw an increase in Egyptian activity in the region, with trading expeditions travelling beyond Lower Nubia. In his tomb biography, Weni reports incorporating southern auxiliaries from Wawat, Irtjet, Medja, Kami, Yam, and the Tjemeh Lands (Libya) into a large Egyptian expeditionary force during the reign of Pepy I. Under king Merenre I, Weni notes cutting a canal near Elephantine, presumably to facilitate shipping in the cataract region; the same ruler commissioned him to employ Nubians from Wawat, Irtjet, Medja, and Yam to build four barges from Nubian acacia trees to transport stone for his pyramid complex. Nubians also worked at the Egyptian Red Sea anchorage at Mersa Gawasis, where Nubian cooking pots span 2500–1500 BC. Other Sixth Dynasty activity is attested by inscriptions in Egypt's southeastern desert and further south in Nubia, including at Wadi Dungash and Bir Mueilha (Wadi Umm Hoda), which reflect



(Top) A view of the Deffufa in Kerma. Dated to ca. 1750-1480 BC, it was a large mud brick building that served either as a palace or a temple. The Kerma Culture may mark the start of a larger Nubian state.

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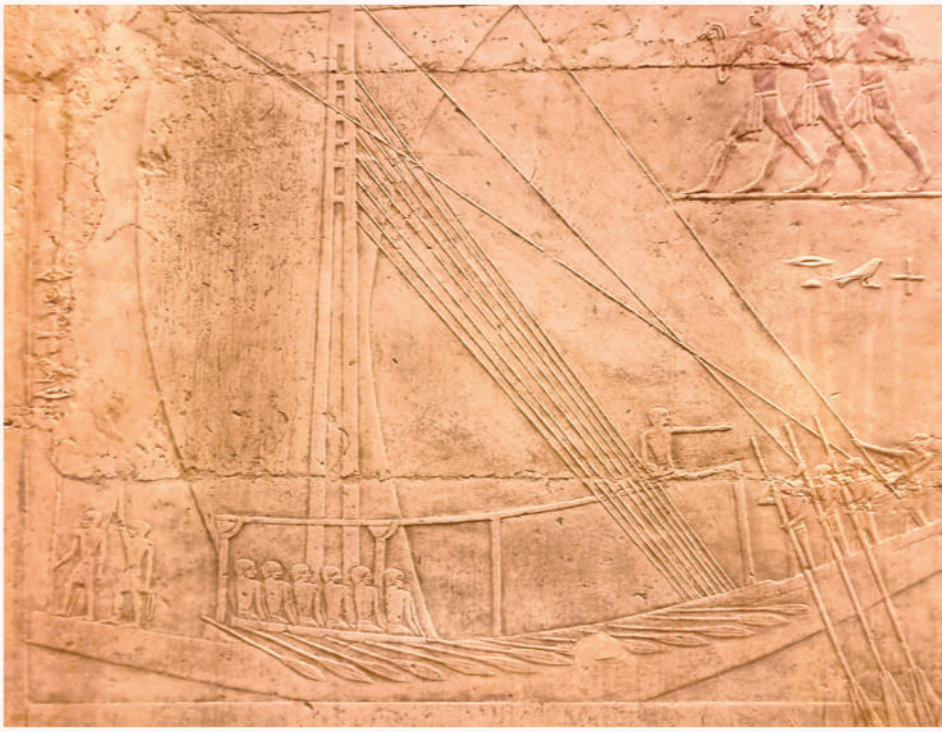

(Bottom) A relief from the tomb of Ti, a high-ranking official during the Fifth Dynasty, depicting a ship. Ships and boats were a key element of Egyptian expeditions into Nubia, which would travel along both the Nile and the Red Sea.

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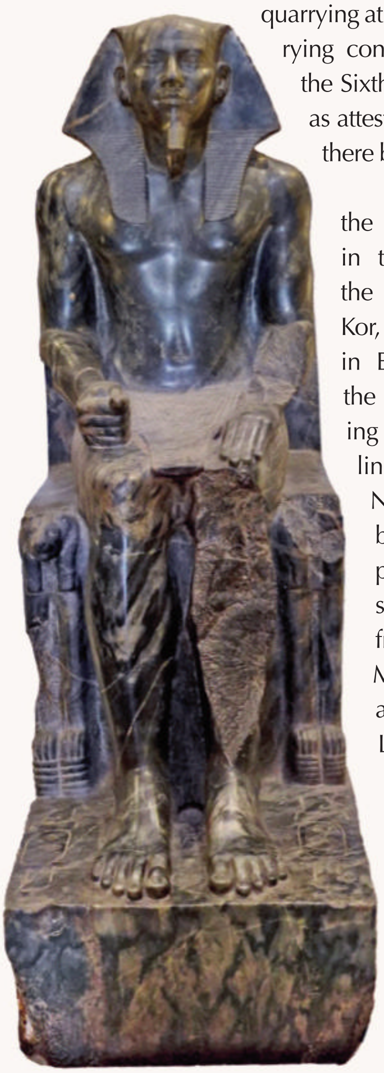

An anorthosite-gneiss statue of king Khafre from his Valley Temple at Giza, dated to the Old Kingdom (Fourth Dynasty, ca. 26th century BC). The Egyptians quarried gneiss, a popular material in the Old Kingdom, in Lower Nubia.

© Olaf Tausch / Wikimedia Commons

The so-called Palermo Stone, a basalt plaque inscribed with the Royal Annals of Egypt's Old Kingdom, from the First Dynasty (ca. 3150–2890 BC) to the early part of the Fifth Dynasty (ca. 2392–2283 BC). The inscription is believed to have been made during the Fifth Dynasty, ca. 2475-2350 BC.
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Red Sea trade with Punt

Beginning in the Predynastic period, Egypt likely had contacts with the southern Red Sea region (roughly modern Ethiopia and Eritrea), later equated with an elusive and probably shifting land of 'Punt', via Upper Nubia and possibly Red Sea travel. For example, the Fifth Dynasty king Sahure's mortuary temple depicts cowpeas, which originate from sub-Saharan Africa, while scenes of a Red Sea voyage returning from Punt with males, females, and children, dogs, baboons, and monkeys, and live frankincense trees have recently been discovered by the causeway of his mortuary temple. The Palermo Stone adds that Sahure's mission to Punt obtained 80,000 measures of myrrh (*ʻntyw*), 23,020 measures of an unguent, 6000 pieces of electrum (*dʻm*), and 2900 nodules of malachite (*w3d-šsmt*).

Investigations at a Red Sea anchorage at Mersa Gawasis and other Red Sea ports, have revealed that Old Kingdom and later expeditions dismantled cedar ships, or brought replacement parts, for transport through the eastern desert to coastal sites, re-assembling the ships at coastal installations, and setting sail for various Red Sea destinations. In the meantime, the bulk of these expeditions spent the summer months quarrying stone, mining metals, and obtaining other materials whilst awaiting the ships' return. In-between voyages, ships would be disassembled, scraped clean of barnacles, and stored in rock-cut galleries awaiting future voyages. The potential dangers faced by these expeditions are noted in Pepynakht's tomb biography, he described the massacre of an Egyptian expedition on the Red Sea coast by "sand dwellers", prior to embarking for Punt, and a follow-up mission to retrieve the commander's body for burial in Egypt.

Egyptian prospecting for materials other than gold (conspicuous by its absence in rock texts).

The governors of Elephantine and their sons, during the Sixth Dynasty, led overland and riverine trading caravans through Lower Nubia to Yam in sub-Saharan Africa. Yam's location remains debated: it may possibly encompass the early settlement at Kerma (ca. 2500–2050 BC). The settlement of Kerma and its adjacent burial mounds display close contact with C Group in Lower Nubia and some late Old Kingdom Egyptian items. A stele naming two ship's captains demonstrates the arrival of an Old Kingdom riverine mission; numerous calcite unguent containers bearing the names of Pepy I, Merenre I, and Pepy II attest to royal gifts, and copper daggers, axe heads, and mirrors reflect additional gifts and trade. An Early Kerma cemetery (H29), 100 km south of Kerma, contained a few graves with Egyptian luxury imports. Egyptian copper alloy mirrors, and other items, also appear at Early Kerma sites reaching the Fourth Cataract, attesting to a widespread dispersal of relatively few Egyptian commodities in isolated contexts.

Increasing hostilities and misfortunes did occur during the Sixth Dynasty. Mekhu I, a caravan leader, died in Lower Nubia through unspecified causes, as did his son and successor, Sabni, at the end of his own expedition to Nubia. These tragedies highlight the dangers and hardships of foreign travel alongside the high value placed on the materials being sought by Egypt. Egyptian officials negotiated with locals to retrieve the commanders' bodies: Sabni brought 100 donkeys, including gifts of oils, honey, linen, and faience vessels to pay pertinent people in Wawat. He adds that he was able to retrieve all the tribute

A reconstructed Kerma Culture burial, dated to ca. 2050-1750 BC, from a cemetery in the Northern Dongola reach, north Sudan. The site of Kerma appears to have been a core settlement of the C Group culture, which had resettled much of Lower Nubia by ca. 2400 BC.
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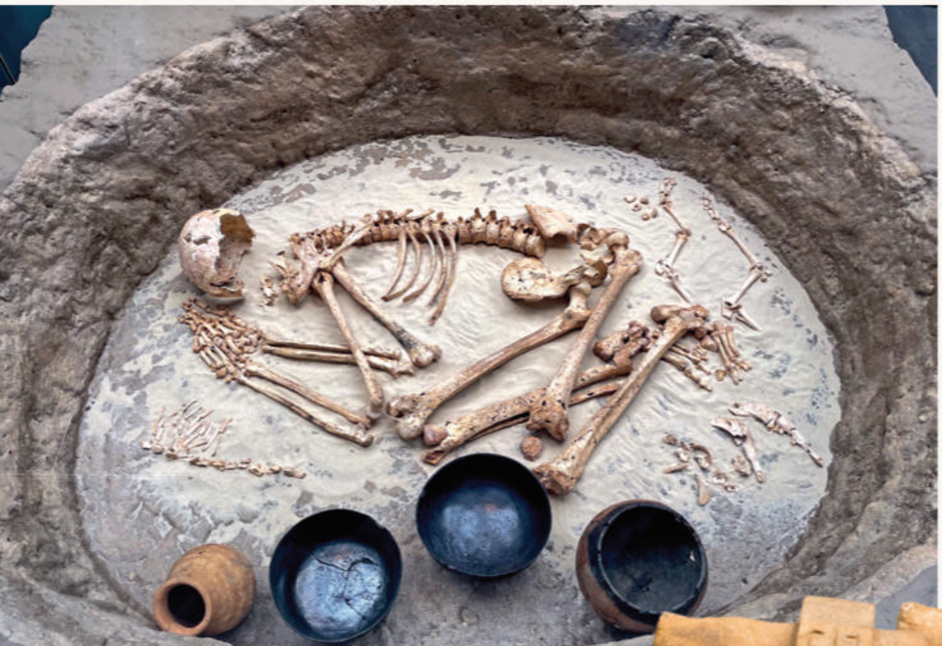
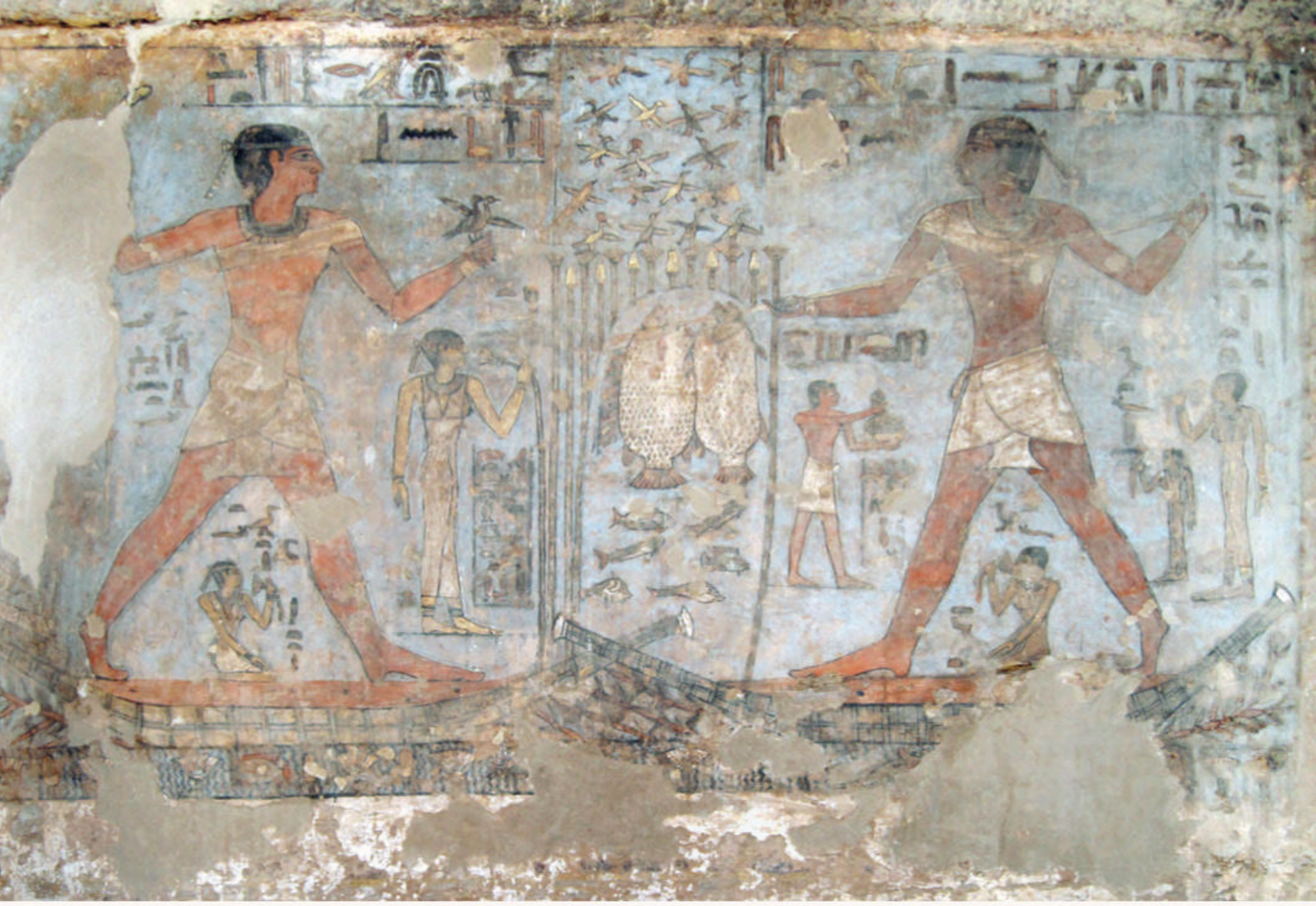


Dated to the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2030–1850 BC), this painted model of two donkeys – important animals for long-distance trade – show the animals being loaded by their drivers.
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art



A painting within the Old Kingdom tomb of Mekhu and Sabni in Qubbet el-Hawa, near Aswan. The fresco depicts Sabni standing on a reed boat, hunting and fishing on the Nile.

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An ivory figurine of a Pygmy dance leader, dated to the early to mid-Twelfth Dynasty, ca. 1950–1885 BC.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

that his father had been transporting back to Egypt, including incense, a noteworthy 1.5-m-long elephant tusk, and an especially large lion skin.

Another expedition leader, Harkhuf, recorded several missions he led to Yam during Merenre I's reign. He initially accompanied his father, then became the sole leader on subsequent trips, starting from the Thinite province (Abydos). Harkhuf's seven-to-eight-month-long journeys used either the Elephant Road or the Oasis Road to traverse the western regions of Irtjet, Mekher, Tereres, and Iertjetj, and returned via a different route through Setjau, Irtjet, and Wawat, converging with the Nile and following it to Elephantine. He retrieved "great amounts of tribute", "all sorts of perfect and luxury items of tribute", incense, ebony (African Blackwood), *heknu* oil, *shesat*, panther skins, elephant tusks, throw-sticks, and cattle and goats. Regarding his most memorable mission to Yam, early in Pepy II's reign, Harkhuf brought back a "pygmy (*dng*) of the god's dances", described as so rare an occurrence that Pepy valued it more than the expedition's entire cargo. Pepy II wrote a letter to Harkhuf urging him to safeguard the pygmy constantly during the Nile segment of his return to Egypt. During Pepy II's long reign, another governor of Elephantine, Pepynakht, in his tomb biography recorded leading two campaigns against Wawat and Irtjet in Lower Nubia, killing many foes and retrieving numerous captives (including chiefs), cattle, and sheep and goats.

The end of the beginning

The late Predynastic through Old Kingdom forms a crucial period in defining Egypt's awareness, interest, and commitment to trading when needed, and controlling key portions of northern Nubia when possible. Later, in the Middle Kingdom, Egypt established substantial fortifications throughout Lower Nubia, safeguarding access to the gold mines of Wawat, stone quarries, and other resources, whilst securing Lower Nubia from adjacent desert tribes and an emerging, powerful kingdom based at the fortified city at Kerma, with which Egypt both traded and fought. **AH**

Greg Mumford is an Associate Professor of (Egyptian) Archaeology in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He excavates in Sinai and el-Licht in Egypt.

A statue of a bound and kneeling captive, dating to the Sixth Dynasty (ca. 2246-2152 BC). Egyptian expeditions to Lower Nubia during the Sixth Dynasty were sometimes violent, with expedition leaders often getting killed. Other expeditions set out with the aim of taking captives.

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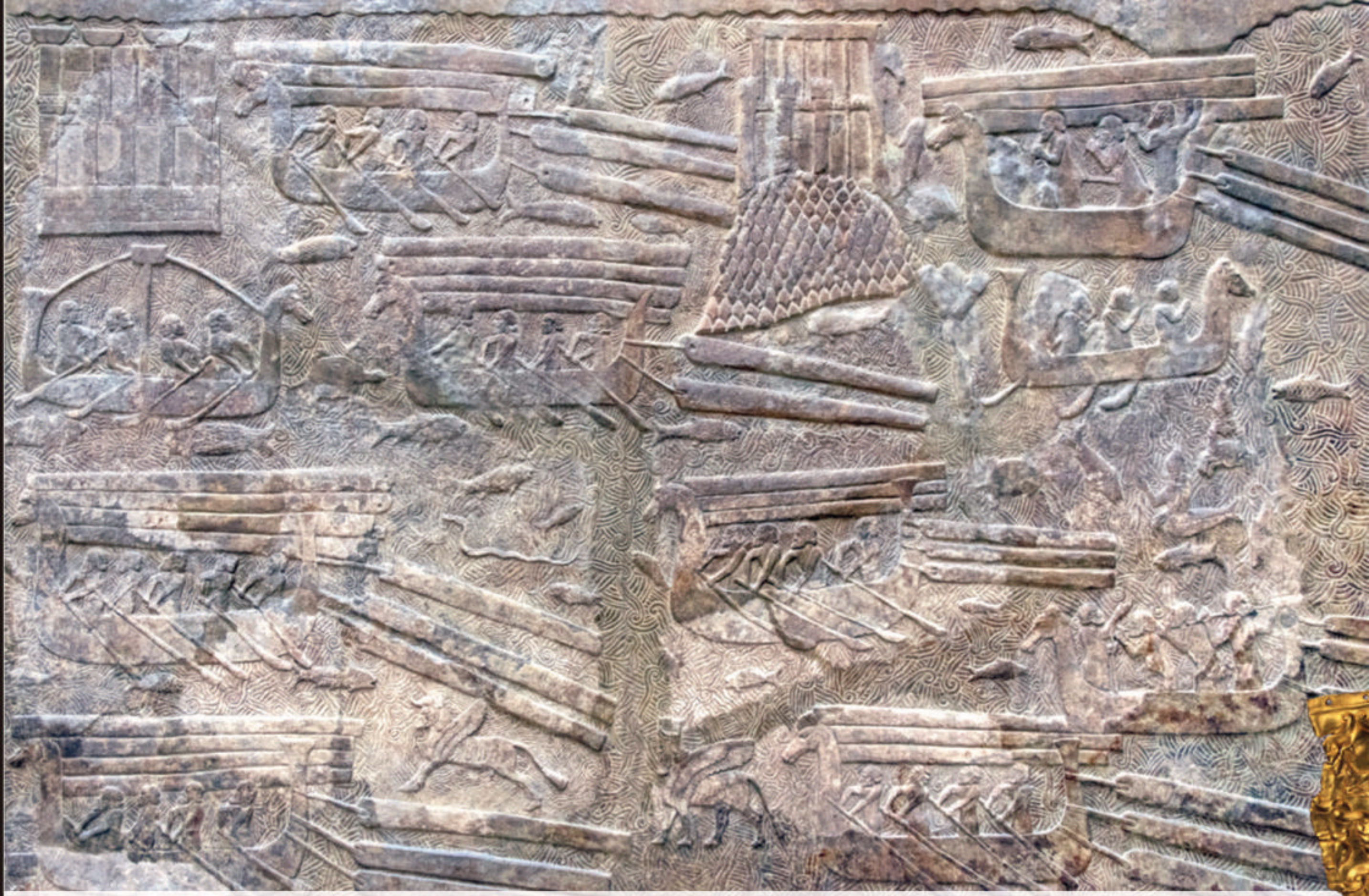

A relief from the Assyrian palace of Dur-Sharrukin, dated to the eighth century BC, depicting Phoenician ships transporting cedar wood, one of Phoenicia's most important exports.

THEME

EXPLORING PHOENICIAN INFLUENCE

OVERLOOKED INNOVATORS

By Murray Dahm

According to Herodotus "These Phoenicians … brought with them to Hellas, among many other kinds of learning, the alphabet, which had been unknown before this, I think, to the Greeks" (5.58). Famed for providing the model for the Greek alphabet and being among the most famous merchants and explorers of all time, many aspects of the Phoenicians remain a mystery.

Hailing from the Levant, the Phoenicians were famous as traders and explorers whose travels spread throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, reaching Spain, the western coast of Africa, and perhaps even further. Unfortunately, we do not know how the Phoenicians referred to themselves – if, in fact, they did (see López-Ruiz, this issue). We currently know them by the Greeks' name for them, which may derive from the Greek for purple (*phoinikes*), after the purple dye that was produced by the murex sea snail that inhabited the Phoenician coastline. Indeed, it has been argued that the Greek word for Phoenicia (*phoenix*) itself meant 'land of purple'. Much like the Greeks, Phoenicia was never a unified state but a collection of city states, and they referred to themselves as the occupants of each city, as Tyrians from Tyre or Sidonians from Sidon, for example.

A gilded silver bowl, dated to ca. 710-675 BC, depicting a hunting scene, as well as marching soldiers and plants. Phoenician art spread throughout the Mediterranean and was adopted by various cultures.

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Origins of the Phoenicians

What we identify as Phoenician culture emerged from the Late Bronze Age Collapse in the twelfth century BC. The collapse or retraction of the various great powers in the Late Bronze Age created a vacuum into which various new states emerged. They may have been part of an older indigenous Canaanite civilization that inhabited the same region during the Bronze Age, although they

A fossilized murex shell, a type of sea snail that was harvested by the Phoenicians to produce the purple dye they were famous for.

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soon became distinct and were regarded, and regarded themselves, as such.

Each city state of Phoenicia had its own government. These were usually monarchies, although there is evidence of other systems too, such as governments ruled by priests, judges (*sufetes* – the system later also used by Carthage), councils, even a commonwealth. Replacing Sidon, Tyre became the most dominant Phoenician city in the tenth century BC and (unusually) set out to conquer the other Phoenician states, even taking over Sidon. Yet this was not the normal pattern and, for the most part, Phoenician cities competed for influence and commercial dominance side by side in a less aggressive manner. Many of the colonies established by the Phoenicians are considered to have been done so peacefully rather than by conquest.

One of three gold pieces from a cover to a cedar box, dated to the ninth century BC.

© University of Pennsylvania

Ancient influencers

The Phoenicians' apogee in the Mediterranean is usually dated to ca. 1200–550 BC, after which Phoenicia became firmly part of other empires, first the Achaemenids, then the Hellenistic empires, and finally the Roman Empire. As master mariners, believed to have first developed the keel and bireme (a ship with two banks of oars), they provided ships and sailors for these empires' navies, particularly that of the Achaemenid Empire, dominating naval warfare for 500 years.

As the Phoenicians sailed throughout the Mediterranean, they spread their knowledge of seamanship, navigation, and perhaps most importantly, the alphabet. A common alphabet or language was an obvious benefit for communication between traders and colonies. The Phoenician script, first developed ca. 1050 BC, was purely alphabetic (with 22 characters), rather than a pictographic or hieroglyphic script where symbols could represent ideas or things, as in Egyptian hieroglyphs. However, written Phoenician only represented consonants, not vowels, which fluent speakers were able to add to understand the word. The Phoenician alphabet had great utility and this was recognized by many cultures. It was soon adopted and adapted by the cultures Phoenician mariners came into contact with, from the Greeks to the Iberians. Although our word 'alphabet' comes from the first two letters of the Greek alphabet (*alpha* and *beta*), they were also the first two characters of the Phoenician alphabet (*alep* and *bet*).

Colonies and commerce

From the cities and ports which came to be identified as Phoenicia, the inhabitants began to develop and expand an extensive maritime trade network (it is sometimes even referred to as a thalassocracy, a maritime empire). Phoenician networks included the entire coast of North Africa, Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica, southern Spain, and the Balearic Islands, even beyond

A terracotta amphora with a Phoenician inscription, dated to the second half of the seventh century BC, said to have been found in the Phoenician settlement of Kition on Cyprus. Many of the goods the Phoenicians transported, especially wine, were carried in amphorae. The Phoenicians are even credited with the creation of the amphora.

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Lost Phoenician literature

Despite their prevalence in ancient history, and their role in the spread of the alphabet, there is very little surviving Phoenician literature. There was certainly Phoenician literature, but it was written on perishable papyrus, which has not survived the ages. The library of Carthage, which would have housed many works of Phoenician literature, such as the agricultural writings of Mago of Carthage, was destroyed, although some works found their way to the library of king Juba of Mauretania (Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.15.8). What Phoenician literature that does survive does so thanks to quotations from later writers, such as that of Sanchuniathon, which was quoted by Philo of Byblos, whose own work survives in quotations in works by Eusebius. Similarly, Marinus of Tyre, a Greco-Phoenician historian active in the late first and early second centuries AD, who likely was working with older Phoenician works and traditions, was used as a major source by Claudius Ptolemy for his *Geography*. As such, for much Phoenician history we must rely on Greco-Roman sources, which do not necessarily represent Phoenician information accurately, particularly for their early history, such as Herodotus, or which are especially late, such as Clement of Alexandria, who was writing in the second century AD.

The so-called Aedilian Inscription, dated to the fourth to second centuries BC. Integral to the understanding of Carthage's political system, it notes several magistracies. Unfortunately, Phoenician and Punic literature recorded on papyrus and other perishable materials has been lost, meaning we are reliant on inscriptions.

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A glass perfume bottle from Cyprus, dated to ca. 625–600 BC. It is presumably Phoenician, given the importance of the glass-making industry in the region.

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A sarcophagus that contained the remains of king Eshmunazar II of Sidon, dated to the sixth century BC, a time when Phoenicia was controlled by the Achaemenid Empire. Under the Achaemenids, Phoenicia regained an element of autonomy it had lost under the Assyrians and Babylonians.

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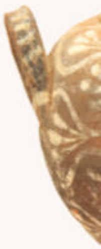
the Pillars of Heracles, reaching perhaps as far as the Canary Islands and Britain. The Phoenicians also traded along the southern Anatolian coast, Cyprus, and Crete, and into the Aegean Sea as far as Thasos and the Chalcidice Peninsula. They may even have sailed as far as the southern Black Sea.

The Phoenicians' most famous colony was Carthage – Qart Hadasht ('new city') in Phoenician – which was founded, according to the Roman tradition found in Virgil's *Aeneid*, in 814 BC by Queen Dido of Tyre (see Ortega, this issue). There were other important Phoenician colonies throughout the western Mediterranean. Usually, these colonies were largely autonomous, but were expected to pay tribute to their 'home' city. Tingi (originally Tyng, now modern Tangier, Morocco) was founded by the Phoenicians in the tenth century BC – the name might relate to its location on high ground. Gadir (modern Cádiz, Spain) was founded perhaps in 1100 BC, although no evidence has been found dating to earlier than the ninth century BC; its name meant 'wall' or perhaps 'stronghold' in Phoenician. Lepcis Magna (modern Khoms, Libya), founded in the seventh century BC, was an important port along the Gulf of Syrta, and would remain so into the Roman Empire (see Brain, *AH* 52); Phoenician inscriptions from the city call it Lpqy or Lpqi, but it may have been originally known as Qart Hadasht, as several Greek sources call it Neapolis. From the mid-sixth century BC, Carthage – by far the most powerful Phoenician colony – began to expand her influence throughout the western Mediterranean, incorporating other Phoenician colonies in North Africa, Spain, and the Mediterranean islands into a powerful maritime empire.

In addition to purple murex dyes, the Phoenicians were also famous for the textiles dyed with it – Tyrian purple is mentioned in both the *Iliad* and the book of Exodus. The Trojan prince Paris, for example, is said to own "elaborately wrought robes, the work of Sidonian women" (*Iliad* 6.289–90). Another mainstay of Phoenician trade was cedarwood from the extensive forests on Mount Lebanon, as wood was in great demand throughout Egypt and Mesopotamia. From the fifteenth century BC onwards, Egyptian hieroglyphs refer to Phoenicia as *fenekhu* ('carpenters'), possibly referring to Phoenicia as one of the only sources of useable wood for Egyptian construction; this word bears a close similarity to the Greek *phoenix*. The Phoenicians also traded wine – extensive kilns have been discovered for making pottery to transport wine. Some even credit the Phoenicians with the invention of the amphora itself, used for transporting wine and all sorts of liquids for centuries thereafter. Wine-making may even have spread from Phoenicia to other parts of the Mediterranean, after all, Phoenician colonies in North Africa, Sicily, France, and Spain tend to have associated wine-making facilities (although most cultures, such as the Greeks and Romans, had alternative – usually divine – explanations of where viticulture had originated). In 2014, the remains of a Phoenician trading ship with 50 amphorae of wine was found off Gozo, Malta – one of the oldest Mediterranean shipwrecks – and other Phoenician shipwrecks, such as those found off the coast of Israel in 1997, provide further evidence of the Phoenicians' wine trade. Alongside wine, olive oil was also a staple of Phoenician trade connections, and as the glass-making centre of the Mediterranean, Phoenicians may also have been responsible for spreading glass-making technologies and innovations throughout the Mediterranean. While many of the trade goods the Phoenicians were associated with are local exports from Phoenicia, the Phoenicians also traded in goods from elsewhere, as demonstrated by the trade in lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, gold from Egypt



The remains of the temple of Baal in Motya, a Phoenician colony founded in ca. 800 BC. The Phoenicians started many colonies throughout the Mediterranean, with the foundation myths of some dating them to the late second millennium BC, although archaeological evidence tends to point to later dates.

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A fragment of a bronze band from the Balawat Gate, dated to ca. 859–824 BC, depicting Syrian porters carrying Phoenician tribute to the Assyrians.

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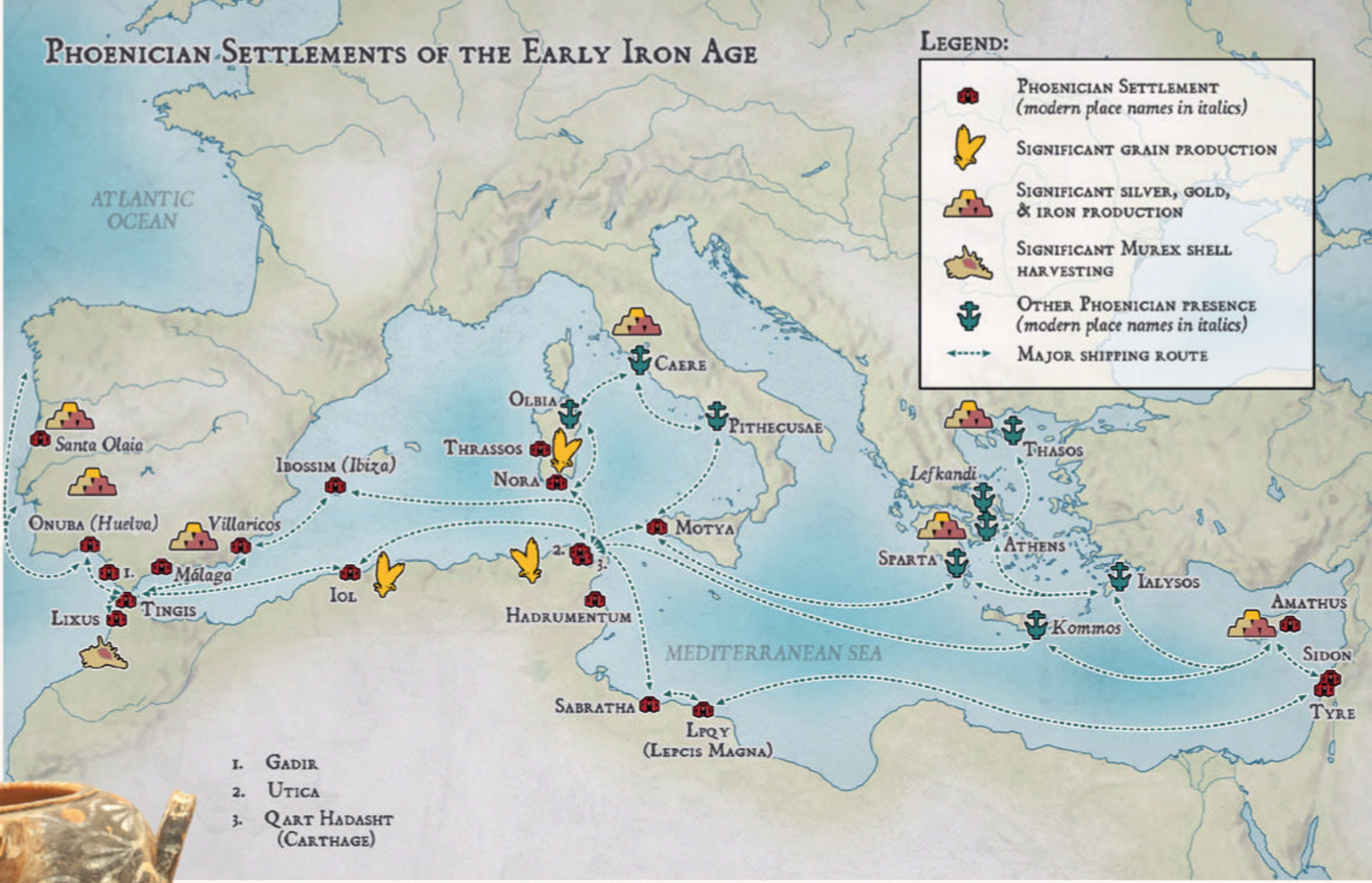
Phoenician Settlements of the Early Iron Age
Legend:
Phoenician Settlement (modern place names in italics)
Significant grain production
Significant silver, gold, & iron production
Significant Murex shell harvesting
Other Phoenician presence (modern place names in italics)
Major shipping route
Atlantic Ocean
Mediterranean Sea
Santa Olaia
Onuba (Huelva)
Villaricos
Málaga
Ibossim (Ibiza)
Lixus
Tingis
1.
Iol
Olbia
Thrassos
Nora
Caere
Pithecusae
Motya
2.
3.
Hadrumentum
Sabratha
Lpqy (Lepcis Magna)
Lefkandi
Thasos
Athens
Sparta
Ialysos
Kommos
Amathus
Sidon
Tyre
1. Gadir
2. Utica
3. Qart Hadasht (Carthage)

A map showing various locations around the Mediterranean which were either a Phoenician colony or had a significant Phoenician presence. Soon after the Late Bronze Age Collapse, Phoenician ships began to sail the Mediterranean, even passing beyond the Pillars of Heracles. As they travelled, the Phoenicians settled amongst local communities or established their own colonies, often in regions with natural resources that could be exploited, such as metals and murex sea snails.

© Richard Thomson

A Karames Ware vase, dated to ca. 1900–1700 BC. It remains the earliest imported object in Byblos, attesting to the Levant's maritime connections.

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and the Iberian Peninsula, and papyrus also from Egypt. Silver from Spain and Sardinia has been found in the 'home' cities of Phoenicia, revealing this was a system of multi-directional networks. The tin used in Byblos may have even been sourced in Cornwall!

Decline

Phoenician power and influence began to decline from the time of the Assyrian invasions in 858 BC onwards. The Phoenicians' trade contacts were valued by their new overlords and the cities of Phoenicia were allowed some autonomy for many years. Assyrian control was tightened in the eighth century BC and, as a result, the major cities of Phoenicia rebelled. In response, they were besieged, taken, and lost much of their autonomy. Many of the Phoenician colonies, far from the Assyrians' influence, were able to thrive on their own, however. After the collapse of the Assyrian Empire and its replacement by the Babylonian Empire, the cities of Phoenicia were unable to reassert their independence, despite rebelling. Nebuchadnezzar supposedly besieged Tyre for thirteen years (587–574 BC). After the Babylonians were themselves conquered by the Achaemenid Persians and the cities of Phoenicia yielded to Cyrus the Great, they were granted a great deal of autonomy, dividing Phoenicia into four tributary vassal kingdoms, each centred on an important city: Aradus, Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre.

After the conquest of Alexander the Great, the Phoenicians were gradually incorporated into the Greco-Roman world. The defeat of Carthage by Rome following several wars (264–146 BC) marked the beginning of the end. With Phoenicia annexed by the Roman Empire in 63 BC, Phoenician independence was over. Still, Phoenicia's influence can be seen today all around us, most obviously in the form of the modern alphabet. **AH**

Murray Dahm is the assistant editor of **Ancient Warfare** *magazine.*

A pair of gold and silver Phoenician earrings, dated to the seventh to sixth century BC, said to be from Tharros, a Phoenician settlement on Sardinia.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

A section of the Karatepe bilingual inscription, dated to the ninth century BC, recording the deeds of the kings of Adana in both Luwian hieroglyphs and the Phoenician alphabet.

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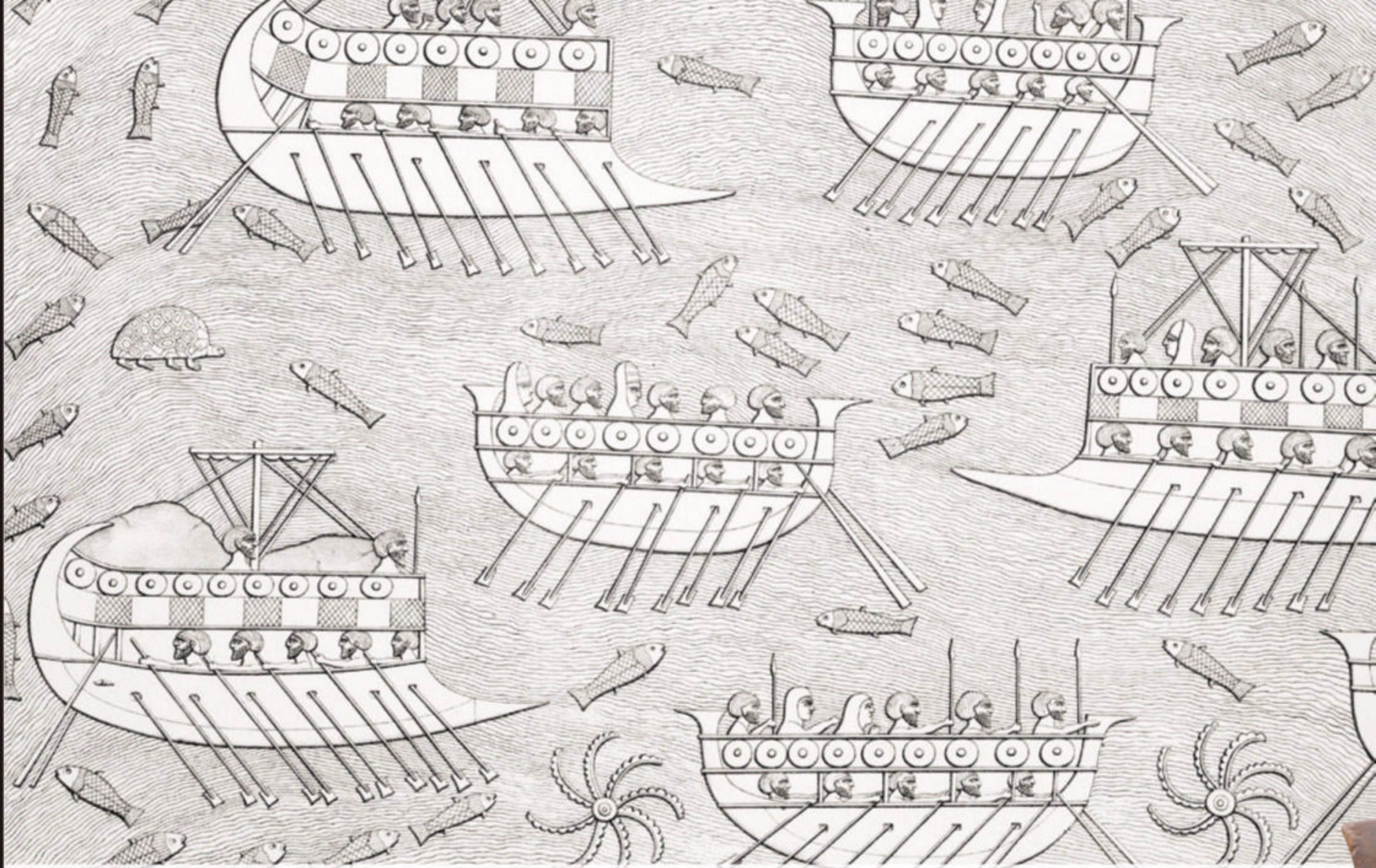


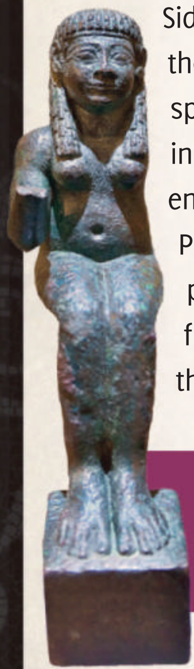
A drawing of a relief from Nineveh, dated to ca. 700 BC, depicting the flight of King Luli of Tyre, who fled the city as the Assyrians approached. Assyrian expansionism was but one reason why the Phoenicians sailed across the Mediterranean. Those that did, founding colonies or settling among local populations, maintained a core Phoenician cultural identity.

THEME

THE ANCIENT PHOENICIANS

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

The Phoenicians pose a fascinating puzzle. Emerging as a distinctive group around 1000 BC in the coastal cities of Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, and others along the Levantine coast, they settled abroad from the late ninth century BC, spreading their language and culture. Without their innovations, our own world would look quite different. Yet there is a question-mark hanging over the Phoenicians' heads. Who were they, as a group, as a people? The contours of the term 'Phoenician' seems fuzzy, difficult to draw. But are they any different in this way to other ancient and even modern cultures?



A statuette of the goddess Ashtart, one of the main Phoenician deities, dated to ca. 725-625 BC, found at the sanctuary of El Carambolo, Spain. The Phoenicians sailed all over the Mediterranean, creating settlements as they went. Despite regional variations, a core identity persisted.

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By Carolina López-Ruiz

Modern scholarship has approached the study of Phoenician culture with a mix of admiration and scepticism. On the one hand, the Phoenicians are celebrated for their contributions to civilization, such as the alphabet and their advanced maritime skills. On the other, some scholars have questioned the validity of 'Phoenician' as a cohesive identity, arguing that it was an invention of Greek and Roman writers rather than a reflection of how the Phoenicians saw themselves. There is, in fact, one huge obstacle that makes Phoenician identity opaque to our modern eyes: the simple fact that they left behind few self-written records, at least of the type that would answer this question. Besides the abundant but generally short inscriptions (mostly funerary), what we know about Phoenician history comes from Greek, Roman, and Biblical sources, which at best reproduce some Phoenician traditions in a very mediated way, but overall present a picture written by history's victors. These sources use a single category for them, 'Phoenicians' or 'Punics', although 'Tyrians' or 'Sidonians' (after their most famous

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cities) also appear as proxy for the whole collective. Some testimonies suggest that the Phoenicians (or some of them) may have used the term 'Canaanite' as a group ethnonym, harkening back to their Levantine background. The external name, 'Phoenician', in any case, was eventually accepted by Phoenician communities to represent themselves internationally, as we can tell from Carthaginian coins using the palm tree (playing with the Greek name *phoenix*, that signified both the tree and the Phoenicians) and by the name's occasional use in Classical-Hellenistic inscriptions and by later Roman authors from the Phoenician region.

Markers of identity

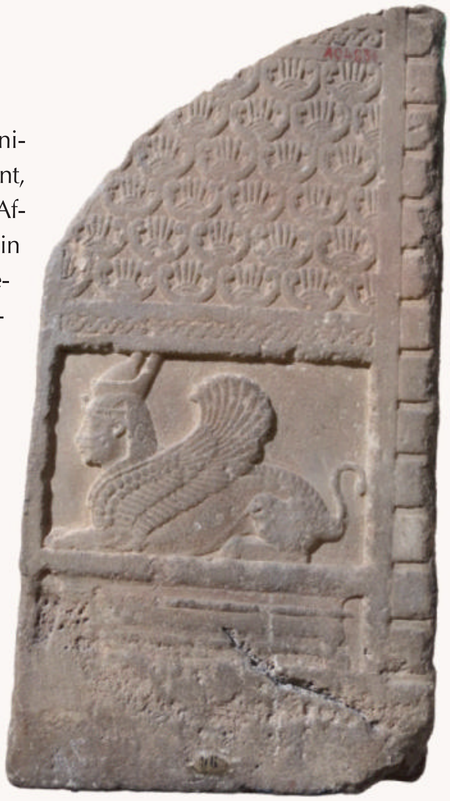
We can reflect on Phoenician identity through the story of a 25–30–year-old man named 'Mattan' by archaeologists. His remains were discovered in Cádiz (ancient Gadir/Gades), Spain, where the Phoenicians established one of their earliest and most prosperous colonies. He had been crushed by a fire's debris in the early sixth century BC. Through DNA analysis, researchers have found that Mattan and others buried in the same area carried genetic markers typical of both the Levantine and Iberian regions, indicating a high degree of cultural blending. This discovery should not be surprising, as it exemplifies a common trait among Phoenicians: they intermarried and integrated with local populations. As expected in any ethnic group, however, shared traits such as language and religion acted as cultural glue within and across Phoenician communities, regardless of their genetic background.

A Phoenician comb, decorated with a relief of a hippo, dated to the fifth to fourth centuries BC.
© Livius.org

Without their own texts, nonetheless, it is difficult to determine to what degree Mattan or his contemporaries identified with a supra-regional Phoenician identity, and it is likely that they felt more strongly about their affiliation with their city, be it Gadir, Utica, Sidon, or any other big-or-small town across the Phoenician realm. With the passing of centuries, regional cultures also developed that differentiated Phoenician communities from various regions, such as the Levant, southern Iberia, southern Italy, and North Africa. The expansive influence of Carthage in the central Mediterranean, for instance, created a sub-culture, with its own characteristics, thriving from the fifth century BC until its defeat by Rome in the Third Punic War in the mid-second century BC. One of those features was the practice of dedicating the remains of cremated infants to the gods Tanit or Ashtart and Baal Hammon (these precincts are known in scholarship as 'Tophet' and were said by Israelites, Greeks, and Romans to be the sites of child sacrifice, although whether child sacrifice was actually practiced is a matter of debate).

An Etruscan *pyxis*, dated to ca. 650–625 BC, imitating Near Eastern artistic motifs introduced by the Phoenicians.
© The Walters Art Museum

Despite the lack of literary texts that may have contained self-generated histories, such as those we have from the contemporary Greeks, dismissing the existence of a larger Phoenician identity is shortsighted. Material culture, linguistic evidence, and religious practices suggest that a sense of Phoenician identity existed, even if it differed from modern concepts of nationality. For all ancient groups, we should depart from the assumption that identities are layered, so that someone could highlight at various times (or in reaction to other groups) their identification with their family lineage, their city, their religious community, or their professional guild. A group's shared ancestry, in turn, was reinforced by a myth of origins that often involved different versions that could also be emphasized, omit-


A marble relief, dated to ca. 850-750 BC, from the Phoenician city of Arwad (Hellenized as Arados), depicting a sphinx wearing an Egyptian crown beneath rows of palmettes. Phoenician art adopted various motifs from neighbouring cultures, especially Egypt, and moulded them into a new style, which then spread throughout the Mediterranean.
© Tangopaso / Wikimedia Commons

A number of *stelae* from the Tophet of Carthage. Tophets, where the remains of children and animals were dedicated to Phoenician gods, were a distinctly central Mediterranean feature of Phoenician settlements, although Biblical accounts do mention such practices among the Canaanites of the Levant.
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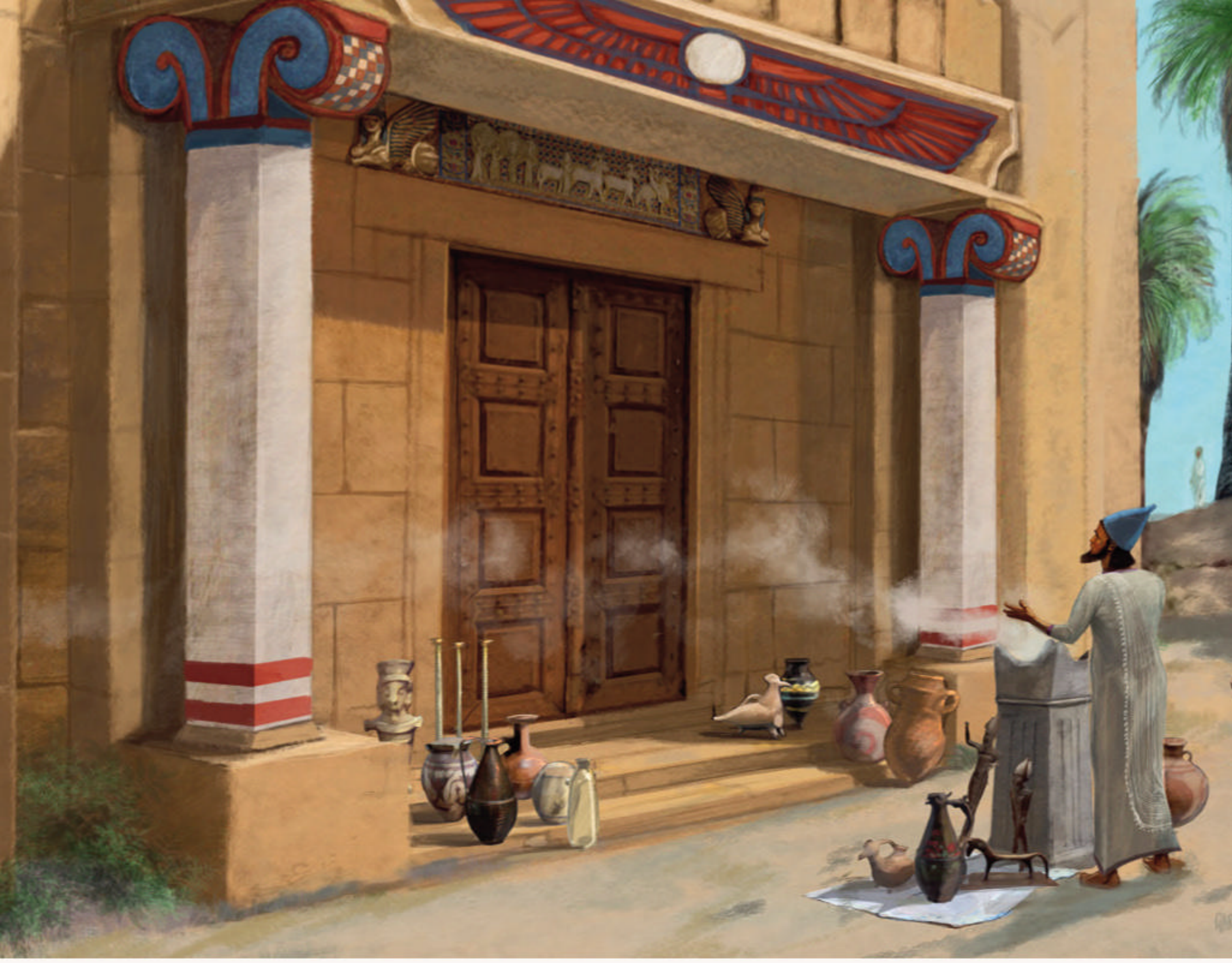

A Phoenician man prays before an altar of burning incense in front of a temple. A unifying element of Phoenician culture throughout the Mediterranean was religion. Sanctuaries to various Phoenician deities, most notably Melqart and Ashtart, were erected at Phoenician colonies and outposts as far away as the Iberian Peninsula. This suggests that the worship of such deities continued even among groups of settlers who had mingled with local groups, which would have helped broadcast a general Phoenician identity.

© Jose G. Moran

This Phoenician gold bowl, dated to the eighth to seventh century BC, is decorated with scenes of warfare and hunting, utilizing both Egyptian and Assyrian motifs. Such artwork travelled across the Mediterranean, where it was adopted and adapted by various local cultures.

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ted, or revised for a historical moment or for a particular audience (just as how the Thebans were both autochthonous and children of the Phoenician Cadmus). In turn, we cannot discard other distinctive aspects; for instance, the Phoenicians might have also thought of themselves as primarily a maritime culture, a trait that distinguishes them from other contemporary Near Eastern and European groups. All in all, most scholars agree that there existed a Phoenician collective identity rooted in shared cultural elements, such as language, religion, and artistic styles. In the case of the Phoenicians, this kinship is particularly evident in their language, institutions, and writing system, which remained remarkably consistent across Phoenician settlements from the Levant to North Africa and Spain.

A term such as ‘Phoenicianisms’ has been used to capture the multiple, overlapping identities that likely coexisted within the Phoenician diaspora, just as we can speak about a variety of Hellenisms depending on time and place. The self-representation and self-determination of all these peoples were shaped by their local environments and interactions with other cultures. For example, in Carthage, Phoenician settlers adopted elements of North African culture, blending them with their own to create a unique Carthaginian identity. Similarly, in the western Mediterranean, Phoenicians were influenced by Iberian, Greek, and Etruscan cultures, yet they managed to preserve their distinct identity through shared religious practices, language, and trade connections. The concern here is to attribute to the Phoenicians a more malleable identity than we do to other groups of whom we simply have more information. We are in danger of building an argument from silence and annulling their ethnic identity. In the pre-Roman, and pre-nation-state Mediterranean, all group identities were more locally-determined and not tied to national boundaries.

A Phoenician statuette of Melqart or Resheph, gods connected to storms, discovered on the southwest coast of Sicily.

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A Phoenician glass pendant, dated to ca. 700–300 BC.

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In short, while the Phoenicians lacked a centralized political structure, they were not devoid of collective identity. Instead of adhering to modern definitions of ethnicity and nationalism, we should understand Phoenician identity as a flexible and dynamic concept that was shaped by shared cultural practices and a common heritage. In this sense, the Phoenicians' sense of identity may have been closer to what we now call a 'cultural identity' rather than a national identity, but ethnicity and aspects of culture are inseparable, and we need to consider similar dynamics were at play for the Phoenicians. Thus, being 'Phoenician' likely meant speaking the same language, worshipping the same gods, sharing ideas about foundational cities and figures (Tyre, Melqart, Dido/Elissa), and participating in the same traditions, regardless of where they lived. This form of identity allowed them to maintain a sense of cohesion across their widespread settlements, even as they adapted to local environs. In other words, the Phoenicians may not have identified themselves as a nation, but they were certainly aware of their commonalities and the ways in which they differed from other groups, such as the Greeks and Egyptians. It is clear that Greeks and Romans had no trouble in identifying Phoenicians when they saw them, along precisely the parameters outlined here, besides others we cannot retrieve from the past, for instance clothing, food, mannerisms, and accents.

The Phoenician trail

Different aspects of the Phoenician cultural identity, from art to religion and language, were present in the Phoenician settlements spread throughout the Mediterranean. The Phoenicians spoke a Northwest Semitic language closely related to Hebrew and Aramaic. Since language and script is, universally speaking, one of the stronger markers of group identity, this degree of linguistic continuity is extremely significant and suggests that Phoenician communities maintained regular contact with each other, and that they cultivated this common language and script as part of their cultural heritage.

Artefacts such as pottery types, votive dedications, and religious symbols were stable elements of the Phoenicians' shared culture, like the Tanit sign, lotus flowers, or the Egyptian *ankh* symbol, among others. Architectural techniques and patterns, and the methods of decorating metal artefacts and ivories, reveal a distinctive Phoenician aesthetic that spread throughout the Mediterranean, labelled 'orientalizing' by scholars. Phoenician gravestones reflect the use of funerary formulae across regions and periods, often listing the names of three or more generations of the deceased's family, showing the importance of ancestry. The personal names that appear in these inscriptions are almost invariably theophoric, that is, containing the name of a god or goddess (e.g. Abdashtart, Zakarbaal, etc.), which reveals religious continuity and cohesiveness, as the same practices, formulae, and names recur in graves from the Levant to North Africa.

Versions of the gods Baal and Ashtart were worshiped across the Phoenician world with local adaptations, such as Melqart, Baal-Hammon, and Tanit. These deities represented aspects of life such as fertility, war, and the sea, resonating with the daily experiences of the Phoenicians, who relied on both agriculture and maritime trade. From a pan-Mediterranean perspective, Melqart is particularly significant. Originating as a Tyrian iteration of the Canaanite Baal, the god loomed large over Phoenician colonies, and was in the Greek world identified with Heracles. As a city-founder (his name means 'city-king'), Melqart was associated with commerce and maritime exploration, reflecting the values that defined Phoenician society. As Phoenician settlers moved across the Mediterranean, they brought Melqart's worship with them, and his cult spread to locations as distant as Gadir, where it integrated into local religious practices. Cities such as Carthage and Gadir

A limstone relief discovered in Tell Halaf, northern Syria, dated to ca. 900 BC, of a man climbing a palm tree. Palm trees could be found throughout the Near East, but the Greeks and Romans came to associate them with the Phoenicians. The Greeks' name for the Phoenicians may even be related to the Greek word for 'palm tree'.

© Rama / Wikimedia Commons

A bilingual inscription from the theatre of the city of Lepcis Magna using both Latin and Neo-Punic scripts. The Phoenicians founded many colonies throughout the central and western Mediterranean in the Early Iron Age. These cities were gradually incorporated into first the Carthaginian Empire, and then the Roman Empire, where they continued to use the Phoenician language and script. Lepcis Magna, for example, was founded by the Phoenicians as Lpqy, possibly on the site of an earlier North African settlement.

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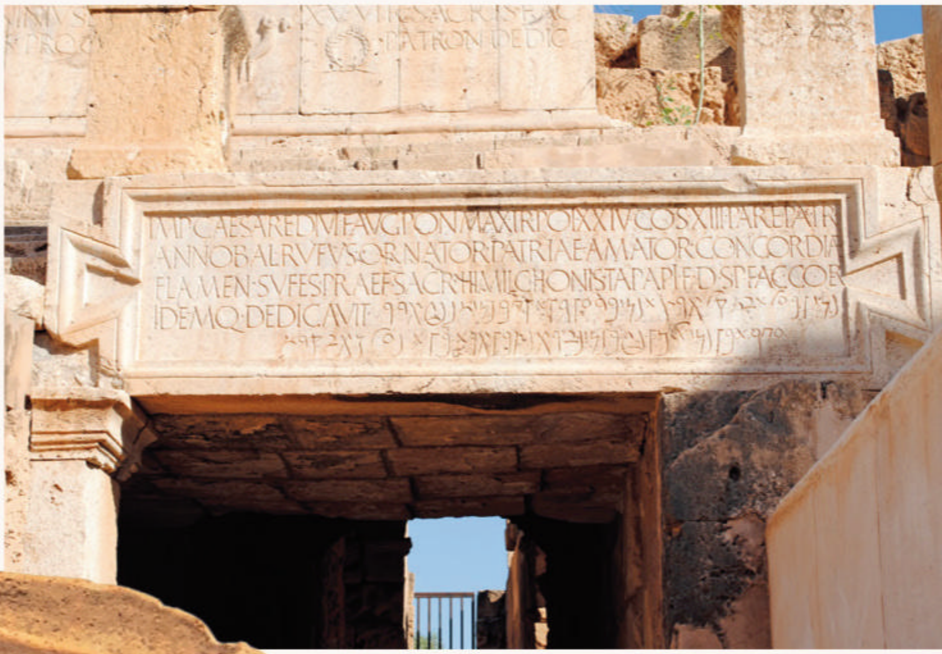

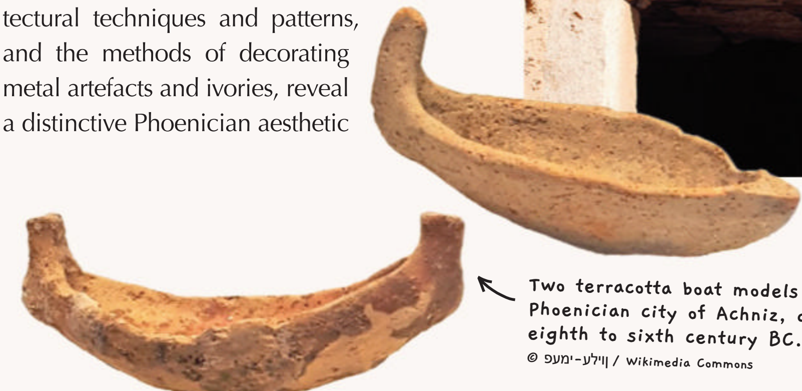

Two terracotta boat models from the Phoenician city of Achniz, dated to the eighth to sixth century BC.

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A Phoenician funerary stele dedicated to Baalshamar, dated to ca. 400-100 BC. Throughout the Phoenician Mediterranean, across a variety of periods, funerary *stelae* followed the same rough formula, often noting three or more generations of the deceased's family, as well as using the same terms for different political offices, where applicable.

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maintained ritual bonds with Tyre expressing their sense of kinship through this shared cult.

The Phoenicians were more than just traders, as they are often portrayed. They facilitated the exchange not only of goods and technologies, but also of ideas and stories. One of their most enduring Phoenician legacies is that of the alphabet. The Phoenicians standardized and spread an alphabetic system previously experimented with by various Canaanite peoples in the second millennium BC. Adapted by Israelites, Aramaeans, and others, it was the Greek version that Etruscans and Latin speakers took up, eventually becoming one of the most widespread writing systems in the world (the one used in this essay). This innovation had a profound impact on Mediterranean civilizations back then, as it enabled more efficient record-keeping and communication.

The Phoenicians were also known for their skill in metalwork, glassmaking, purple-dye extraction, and textile production, as well as ivory carving and the decoration of ostrich eggs, all of which were highly prized items throughout the Mediterranean and inspired imitations and adaptations. The marketing of many of the typical Phoenician exports (ivory, metals, ostrich eggs) required the establishing of trading networks that reached far-off areas where the exotic products could be acquired, and the capacity to sustain a complex chain of production that involved collaborating with local agents as well as artisans and traders. These networks extended as far as Britain and West Africa, and they established ports and colonies that became bustling centers of commerce. Phoenician craftsmen were adept at blending influences from different cultures, especially Egyptian and Syrian-Mesopotamian motifs, into their work. This eclectic style was an inheritance from their Canaanite ancestors and allowed them to appeal to a wide range of clients while still maintaining a unique Phoenician identity. The Phoenicians also introduced new architectural techniques to the regions they settled. Phoenician temples and religious structures, dedicated to deities like Melqart and Ashtart, became focal points not only for worship but for trade and cultural exchange. These structures also reinforced the cultural ties that bound Phoenician communities together.

The Phoenicians' adaptability allowed them to survive and thrive in a variety of cultural contexts. In places like Carthage, they adopted local customs and blended them with their own, creating a hybrid culture that was both Phoenician and uniquely North African. For instance, coins from Punic-period Carthage feature the gods Melqart and Tanit, as well as horses, palm trees, and elephants, symbols that merged Phoenician and North African conno-

A Greek *kylix*, dated to ca. 420 BC, decorated with the Greek abecedary. It includes digamma (here looking like a square 'C'), a letter indicating a 'W' sound, which was gradually lost from most ancient Greek dialects. While there was an overarching Greek identity, there were regional differences, such as the presence of distinct dialects of Greek.

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Hellenicity

The Greeks – or Hellenes – can offer a useful parallel to the Phoenicians, in terms of identity. Like the Phoenicians, they were gathered, primarily, into city states, they were seaward-orientated, and they had a shared culture, albeit with some regional differences. However, unlike the Phoenicians, the Greeks have a vast corpus of surviving literary material.

Herodotus, writing in the mid-fifth century BC, offers an overview of what he thought made someone Greek:

> *"the kinship of all Greeks in blood and speech, and the shrines of gods and the sacrifices that we have in common, and the likeness of our way of life"* (8.144).

Thus, a common way of life, including language and religion, as well as a belief in shared kinship, demonstrated through a myth of a common ancestor, were what made a Greek Greek. The Pelasgians of Attica, according to Herodotus, became 'Greek' after learning the Greek language (1.57). However, in ancient Greece, despite the presence of this notion of 'Greekness', more often than not, individuals would identify themselves by their home city or even by other ethnic identities, such as Ionian, Dorian, or Achaean. Additionally, there were different Greek dialects, as well as regional art styles. Despite Herodotus' neat summary of 'Greekness', there was no single type of Greek, but there is no doubt about the existence of an overarching Greek identity. As for the Phoenicians, due to the lack of surviving Phoenician literature, we do not know if they had a shared myth of descent, but they certainly had a shared language, religion, and culture.

A Punic coin discovered in Entella, Sicily, dated to ca. 320–300 BC, decorated with the head of Arethusa surrounded by dolphins and a horse prancing in front of a palm tree.

© www.cngcoins.com

The remains of a Punic temple on Monte Sirai, Sardinia. It is believed to have been dedicated to Ashtart.

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One of four decorated ostrich eggs from the so-called Isis Tomb in the Etruscan city of Vulci.

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tations. Even after the fall of Carthage in 146 BC, elements of Phoenician identity continued to thrive, particularly in North Africa. In that continent, Phoenician language, institutions (such as the suffetes) and religious symbols were used well into the Roman period, when Augustine speaks to Punic speakers, whom he called 'Canaanites' or speakers of the Canaanite language. The ability to adapt without losing their cultural core is a defining characteristic of Phoenician identity.

Conclusion

While the term 'Phoenician' may have been coined by the Greeks and Romans and was not used by the people we know as Phoenicians, at least initially, it does not negate the existence of a shared cultural identity. Similarities in language, religious practices, and material culture across Phoenician settlements leave little doubt that there was a real sense of belonging among these communities, even if it did not align with modern concepts of ethnicity tied to statehood or nationality. By examining Phoenician identity on its own terms, rather than through the lens of Greek and Roman narratives, we can gain a deeper understanding of how the Phoenicians saw themselves and their place in the world.

Recognizing or denying the Phoenicians a group or ethnic identity has broader implications. Devoid of such group identity, it becomes easier to ignore their historical agency in the ancient world. Too often, the Phoenicians are depicted as scattered and passive subjects of Greek and Roman narratives. Yet by establishing trade networks, founding colonies, and spreading their cultural practices, the Phoenicians helped to create a Mediterranean world that was more interconnected than ever before. The study of the Phoenicians allows us to move beyond simplistic eastern-western dichotomies and recognize the complexity of the Mediterranean world. The Phoenicians modelled how diverse cultures can coexist, adapt, and thrive together, leaving a legacy that transcends time and place. **AH**

Carolina López-Ruiz is is a Professor at the University of Chicago's Divinity School and Department of Classics, and the author of **Phoenicians and the Making of the Mediterranean** *(Harvard University Press, 2021).*

A terracotta sculpture from Alicante, Spain, dated to the fourth century BC, believed to depict the Punic goddess Tanit – who was related to the Phoenician goddess Ashtart. The worship of Phoenician gods and goddesses spread throughout the Mediterranean.

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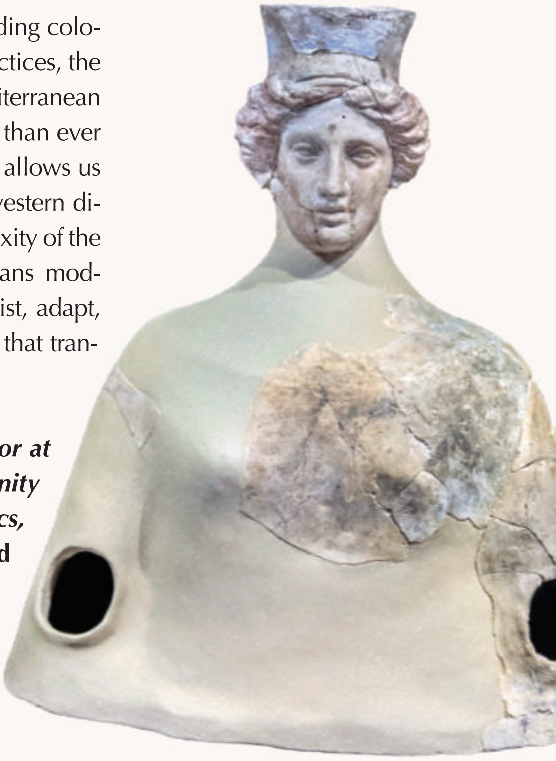

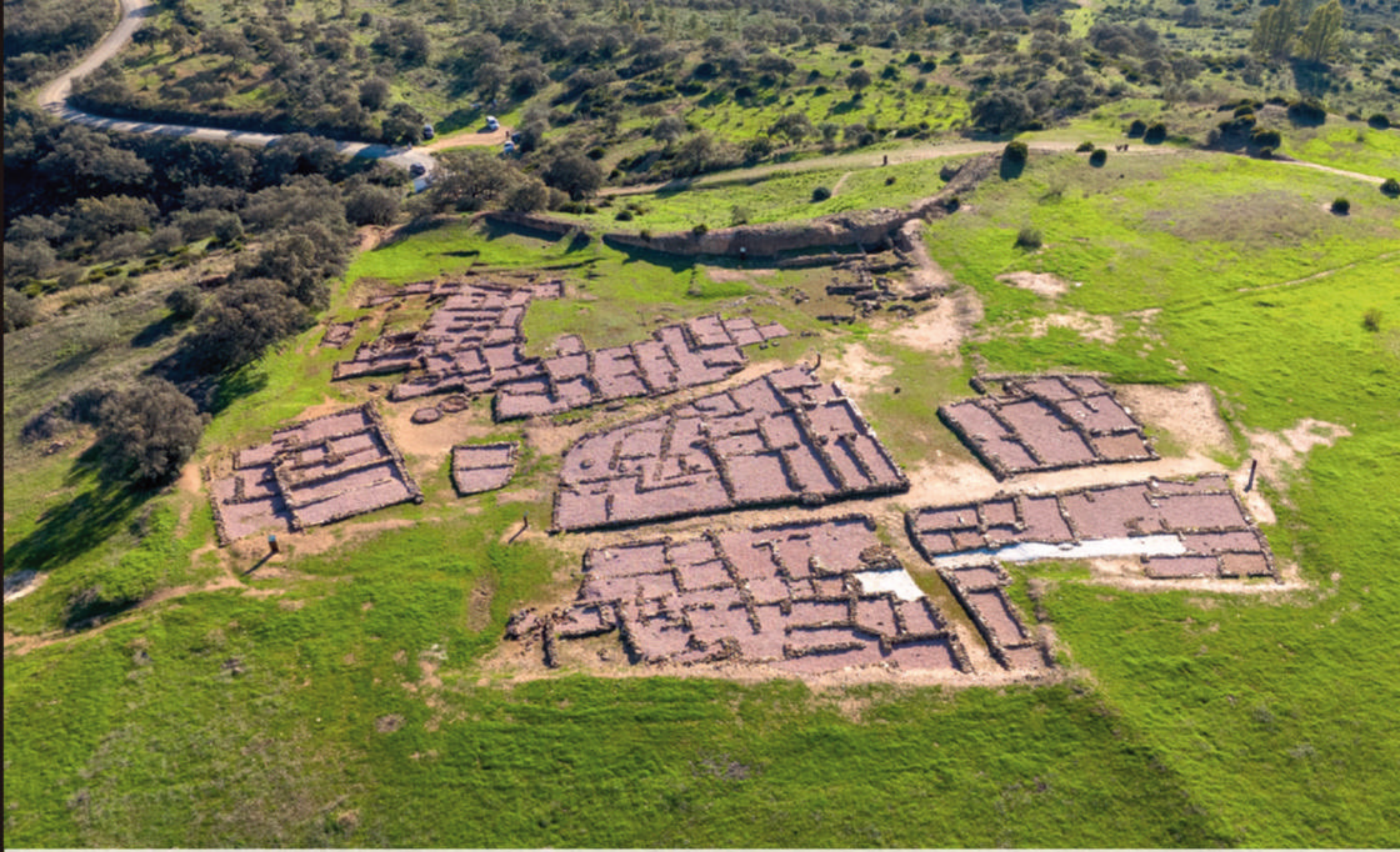

An aerial view of the archaeological site of Tejada la Vieja, dated to eighth century BC. The site has evidence of Tartessic, Phoenician, and Roman habitation.

THEME

FROM MYTH TO HISTORY

PHOENICIANS IN IBERIA AND TARTESSOS

By Eleftheria Pappa

It is well known that the Phoenicians were active throughout much of the Mediterranean, even settling beyond the Pillars of Heracles. In the Iberian Peninsula, the Phoenicians encountered metal-rich lands and quickly established trading outposts and settlements among them. Due to the appearance of the name in Herodotus' *Histories*, modern scholars refer to these inhabitants as Tartessians, inhabiting Tartessos. However, the nature of Tartessos is uncertain. Was it a region, a people, or a state? Is Tartessos the same as Biblical Tarshish?

A Cypriot statue of Heracles, dated to ca. 530-520 BC. Heracles was associated with the Far West in Greco-Roman mythology, with authors specifically stating he travelled to Tartessos.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Phoenicians profoundly transformed life in southern Iberia and had an impact across the entire Peninsula from the early first millennium BC. They brought intense urbanization based on rectilinear architecture and urban layouts (rather than the local 'oval' dwellings), and new technologies and crops (vine, olive). They also brought the Phoenician script, introducing literacy and spurring the local development of several syllabaries (Palaeo-Hispanic scripts) for local languages. Religion was a structural element to the commercial expansion, reflected in the multitude of sanctuaries established in strategic positions and approached by ship, on promontories, estuary margins, and river banks. These were not simply areas of cultic activity but provided 'liaison services' for Phoenician commerce, offered capital, and maintained a depository of geographical knowledge.

Phoenician colonies were established on offshore isles and estuary islets which offered safe anchorage. On the Atlantic coast, the colony of Gadir (meaning 'wall' in Phoenician), was founded on three offshores isles – known in Greek as Erytheia, Kotinoussa, and Antipolis – which make up part of modern Cádiz and its environs. It was famous across the Mediterranean world, especially for its temple of Melqart on the southern end of Kotinoussa, a deity syncretized since ancient times with Heracles. Balsa (Tavira),

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A large gold earring, dated to the sixth century BC, characteristic of Tartessic goldwork.

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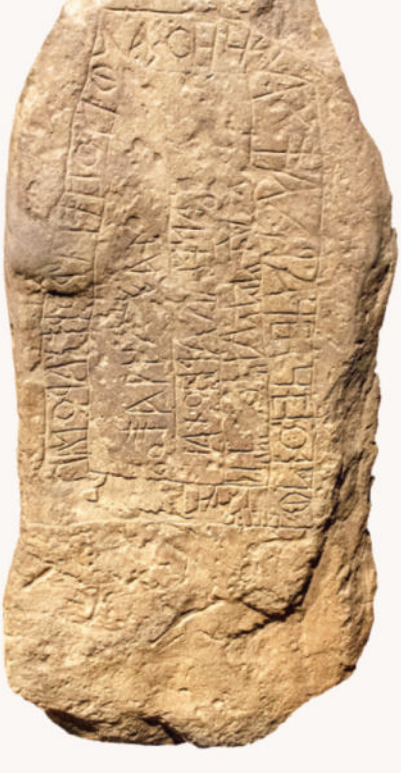
another colony, was founded on the estuary of the River Gilão, protected by a large fortification with bastion towers. Further north, in what was the estuary margin of the River Sado, the small trading-post-cum-sanctuary, now known as Abul, followed typical Phoenician rectilinear architecture. Some of the densest colonial occupation affected the Mediterranean coast of Andalusia, following a typical pattern: the settlement was located on a river mouth facing its necropolis across the water. Local societies were profoundly influenced over the course of centuries, leading to new cultural forms with regional variations, often subsumed under the moniker 'Orientalizing'.

This transplantation of populations was part of a wider phenomenon. Phoenicians, inhabiting what is now Lebanon and parts of coastal Syria and northern Israel, began settling across the shores of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic fringes of Africa and Europe, spurred by a number of factors. Pressed into a narrow strip of land between the precipitous Lebanon Mount range and the Mediterranean Sea, their outlet came through maritime culture. What proved catalytic for the Phoenician expansion, however, was the Assyrian military aggression against the coastal Levantine cities, the attendant tribute demands, followed by the violent conquest and annexation of coastal cities and the mass deportation of their populations to inland areas of the empire, especially from the eighth century BC onwards. Rudimentary port installations, founded as resupplying anchorages and trading posts, over time became full-blown cities as more and more colonists came from the eastern homeland, leaving the political upheaval caused by Assyrian aggression behind. A cursory look at Assyrian inscriptions detailing conquests, together with the palatial reliefs of Phoenicians fleeing their cities clearly suggests that these Phoenicians were not simply seeking profit overseas; they were running away for their lives and for a degree of self-determination. By the sixth century BC, as a direct result, Phoenician communities and their cultural impact stretched from their homeland in Phoenicia to Portugal and the Atlantic shores of Morocco.

However, Iberia, despite being one of the more distant lands from Phoenicia, was one of the earliest regions to be touched by Phoenician commercial networks, sometime in the tenth century BC, towards the end of a period of decline for Assyria. The original impetus for reaching Iberia was not related to belligerent neighbours. Instead,

A fragment of a relief from the palace of the Assyrian king Sennacherib, dated ca. 700 BC, depicting a Phoenician woman fleeing with a baby.

© Zunkir / Wikimedia Commons


A stele known as the Estela de Mesas de Castelinho. From Portugal, it is inscribed with a Paleo-Hispanic script. With the arrival of the Phoenicians and their alphabetic script, the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula adopted and adapted it to create their own form of writing.

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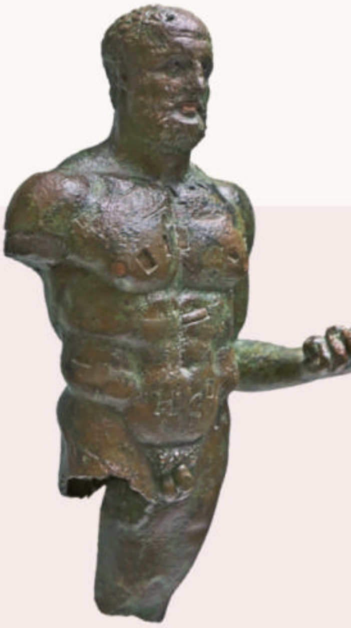
Melqart and Heracles

Ancient religions were, more often than not, syncretic. They would associate a god from one culture with one from their own, if they were similar enough (and such similarities did not need to be very strong). This practice was especially prevalent in the Hellenistic period, after Alexander the Great's conquests brought the Greek world into close contact with many different cultures, especially in the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East. Such syncretism was not new in the Hellenistic period, however. In the Early Iron Age there is evidence for the syncretization of the Greek god Heracles with the Phoenician god Melqart.

Herodotus, writing in the mid-fifth century BC, notes the association between Heracles and Melqart (2.44). However, rather than simply calling them one and the same, Herodotus actually notes the differences between the two. Nonetheless, this association continued into the Hellenistic and Roman periods. On Malta, for instance, two *cippi*, dated to the second century BC, one inscribed in Greek and the other in Phoenician, mention Heracles and Melqart, referring to them as 'founder' and 'lord of Tyre', respectively. Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess* also associated Melqart with Heracles (3).

The precise association between Heracles and Melqart is a matter of debate. One theory suggests they were associated due to their connections to the foundation of overseas colonies. Another theory suggests the association began in the Bronze Age.


A bronze statuette of Heracles, dated to the first to second century AD, and thought to originate in the temple of Heracles Gaditanus. It is located on Kotinoussa, the Greek name for one of the islands in the Gulf of Cádiz on which the Phoenician colony of Gadir was located.

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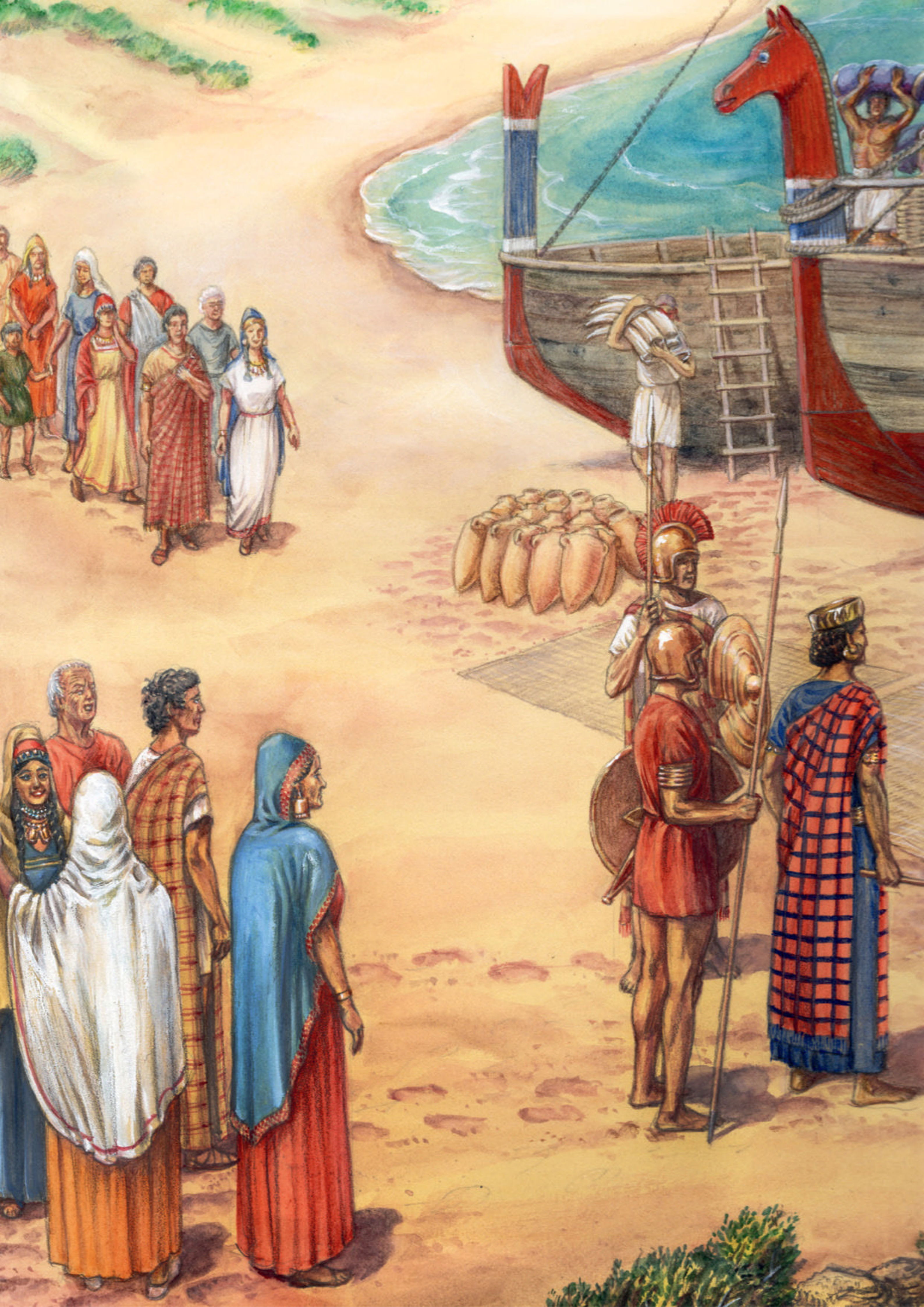
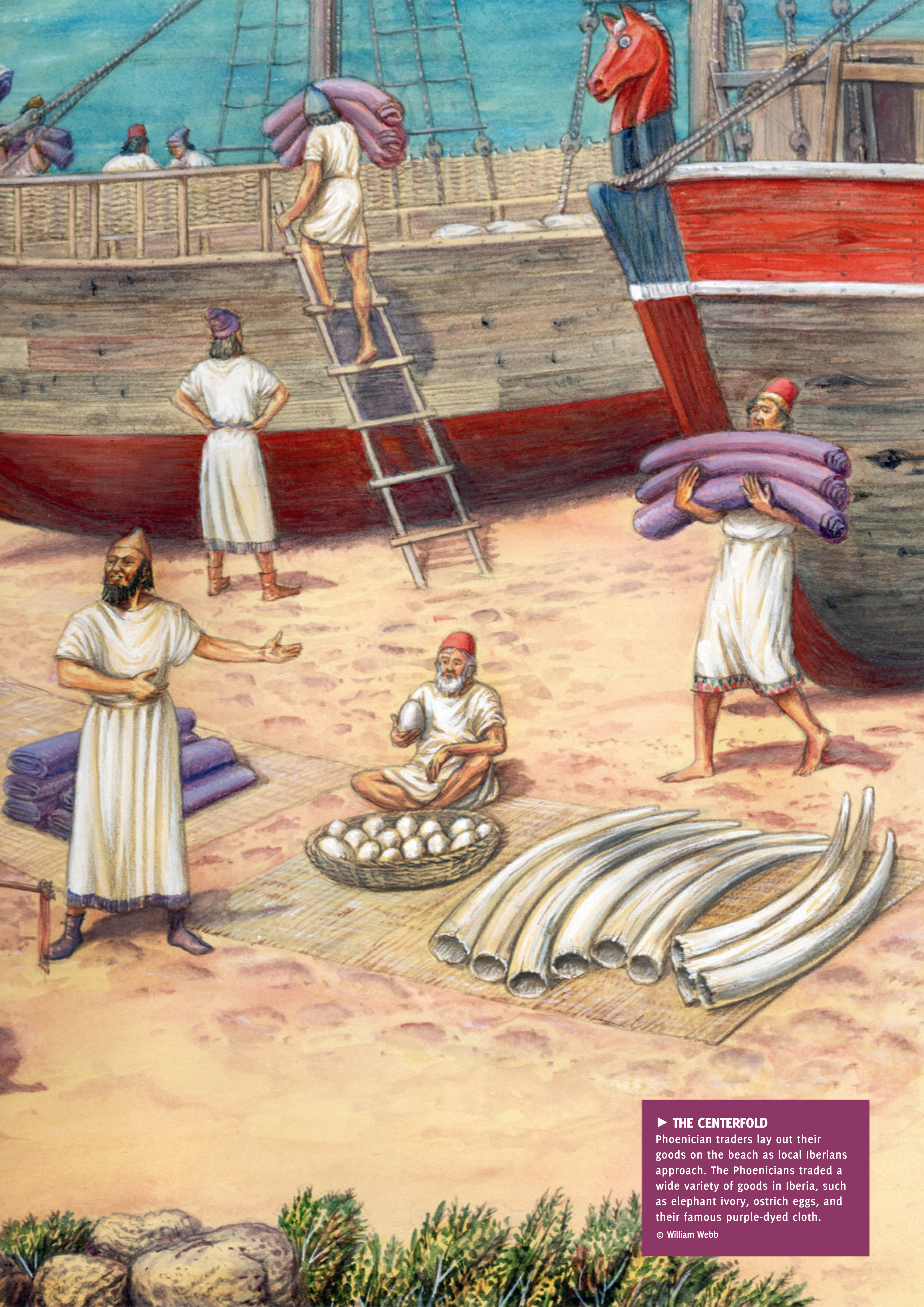
A bronze band from the palace of the Assyrian king Sennacherib, who ruled in the mid-ninth century BC, depicting the offloading of tribute, including various metals, from Phoenician ships.

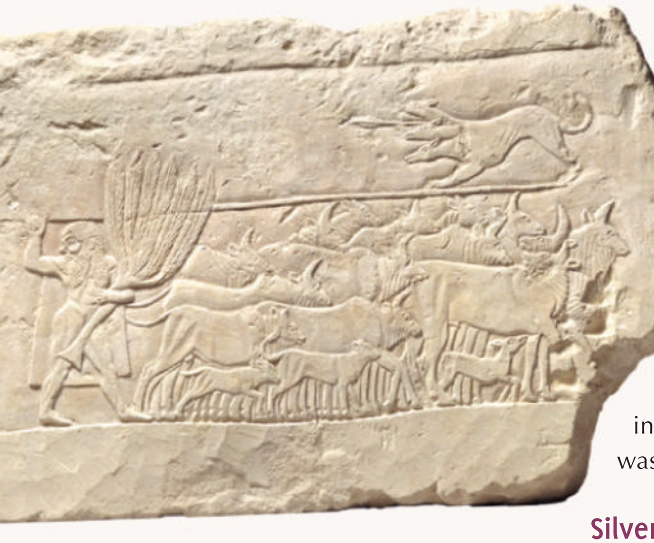
© Lauren van Zoonen





► THE CENTERFOLD
Phoenician traders lay out their goods on the beach as local Iberians approach. The Phoenicians traded a wide variety of goods in Iberia, such as elephant ivory, ostrich eggs, and their famous purple-dyed cloth.

© William Webb



A limestone relief from Cyprus, dated to the sixth century BC, depicting Heracles rustling the cattle of Geryon. Geryon was said to live in the Far West, on the island of Erytheia, which was later associated with Tartessos.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

something else attracted them; the earliest evidence dates to the tenth century BC and was found in Huelva, associated with Tartessos, one of the most famous cultural horizons of Iberia during this period. But what was Tartessos?

Silver-rich Tartessos

Some 25 centuries before Tartessos and its cognates turned, somewhat artificially, into an archaeological designation for the proto-history of southwestern Iberia, it was assimilated into the poetically-rendered genealogies of gods, heroes, and monsters that to the Greeks were a record of ancestral lineage. In mythological descent, collective memory weaved the world of utility and historical event into the symbolic realm, fusing feared events, places, and things into allegory, fertilized by imagination. Properly understood, mythology was a tally of descent, reworked through foundation tales and legends, legitimating social order by placing kings, often sons of gods or goddesses, in kinship with the divine.

It is in such a context that Tartessos first emerges, connected with oceanic lands. Composing his *Theogony* in the seventh century BC, Hesiod placed Heracles' adversary, Geryon, a triple-bodied owner of cattle, on Erytheia ('the Red One' in Greek), surrounded by water. Especially popular in Cyprus, the myth of Heracles fighting Geryon pertained to his tenth labour and was set in western lands, alluded by the epithet given to the cattle 'of a red-golden fleece', a reference to the fading light of the setting sun. Obeying Eurystheus' command to steal the precious herd, Heracles succeeded and returned to the West for the following labour, pilfering not a herd but the golden apples of the Hesperides, nymphs whose names directly link them to the West as a cardinal point (*hespera* is 'sunset' in Greek). Both myths effuse the flavour of a proto-colonial mentality of appropriating resources from distant lands.

Despite the omission of Tartessos in Hesiod's *Theogony* (979–983), Erytheia, described as an island in this poem, was associated with Tartessos in Iberia. In real cartography, Erytheia formed part of Gadir, founded roughly two centuries prior to Hesiod's lifetime, and housed a temple to Astarte. In his *Geryonis*, a poetic reflection on Heracles slaying Geryon from the victim's

A *pinax* from Penteskouphia, near Corinth, dated to ca. 630–550 BC, depicting men working in a mine.

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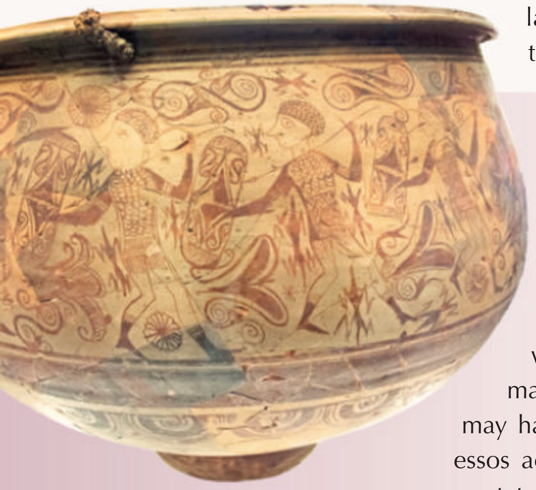
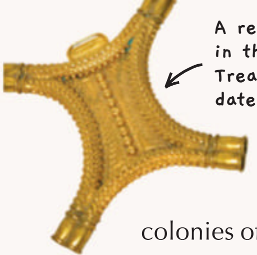


A restored Iberian vessel known as the Vase of the Warriors, dated to the third to early second century BC. Roman interest in the Iberian Peninsula became more pronounced after the Second Punic War, when the Roman presence there became more permanent and widespread.

© Dorieo / Wikimedia Commons

Same people, different name?

Most literary sources of the fourth and third centuries BC have been lost, many of them only surviving in fragments in the works of later historians. Sadly, many of these lost works likely contained much information about southern Iberia, which may have revealed much about what Tartessos actually was, be it a region, culture, or state. Many of these writers were active within the Carthaginian Empire or its sphere of influence. For example, the historian Timaeus of Tauromenium, active in the early third century BC, wrote about the Carthaginians' expansion in the Iberian Peninsula. Polybius, working from these earlier sources, makes no mention of Tartessos. Recording a fourth-century-BC treaty between Carthage and Rome, he does mention a place called Tarseium (3.24), which may refer to Tartessos, based upon the root of the name. Polybius also mentions an Iberian people called the Thersitae (3.33), who may correspond with the Semitic Tarshish. Polybius' description of Iberia during the Punic Wars also mentions the Turdetani at various points, whose location largely overlaps the territory that was previously associated with Tartessos. Does this change of name reflect an actual change in Iberia or does it simply reflect two different traditions, one Greek, the other Latin, mediated through Carthaginian sources?



A reproduction of a gold pectoral in the shape of an ingot from the Treasure of El Carambolo, a hoard dated to the eighth century BC.

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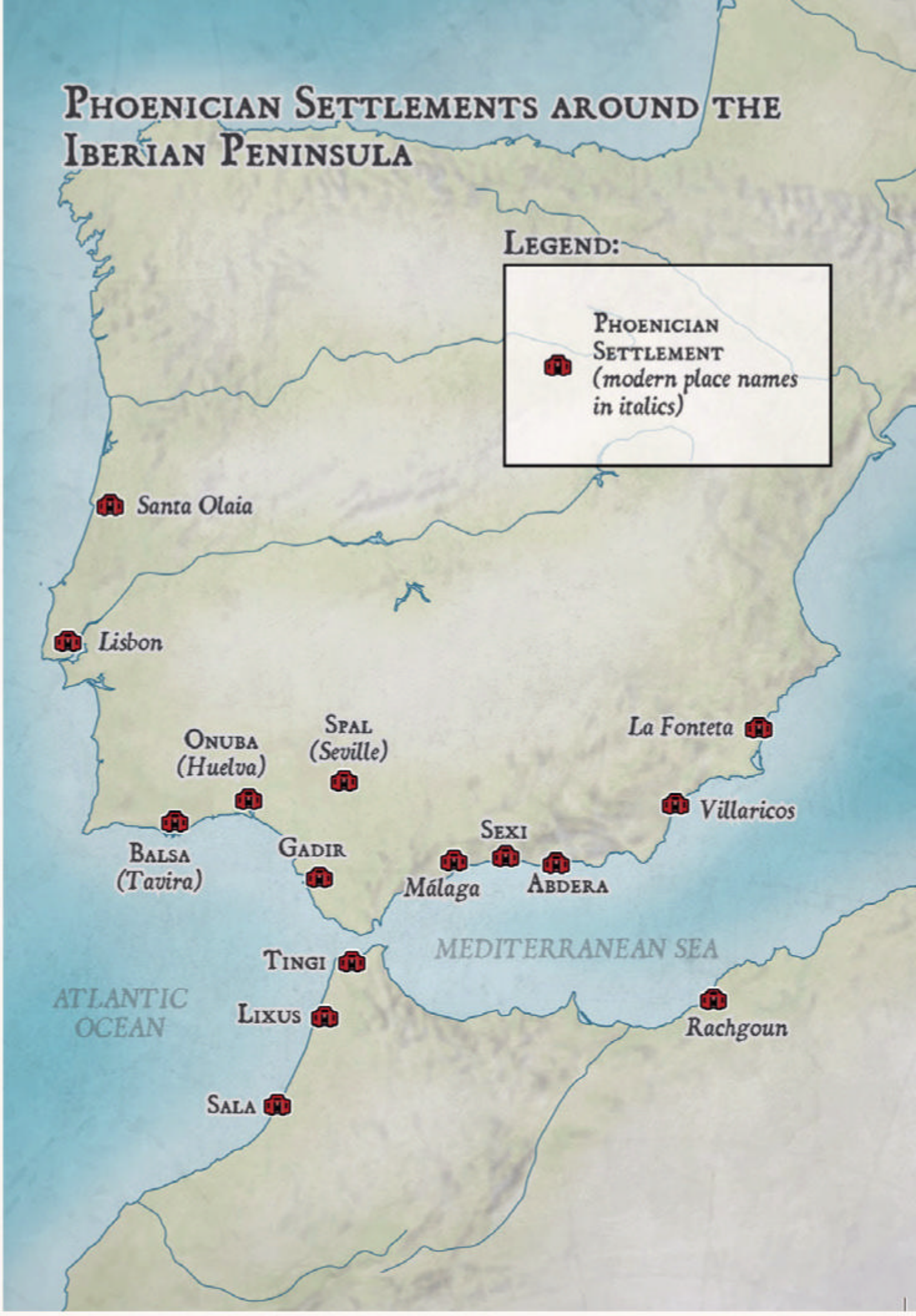
perspective, Stesichorus, who hailed from the Greek colonies of southern Italy and Sicily, and was Hesiod's son according to ancient tradition, gave a precise geographic description: Geryon was born "in a stone cavity almost opposite the famous Erytheia by the infinite silver-source springs of River Tartessos" (Strabo, 3.2.11). That Tartessos was already legendary for its opulence emerges unmistakably also in Anacreon's lyrics; in an extant verse, he quips "I would not want Amaltheia's horn, nor to reign over Tartessos for 150 years" (Strabo, 3.2.14). Amaltheia's horn was also known as the *cornucopia*, a metaphor for 'abundance'; by remarking upon longevity, the poet insinuates his knowledge of tales on Arganthonios, the long-living king of Tartessos, who generously welcomed Phocaean seafarers in his rich kingdom (Herodotus, 1.163). This royal personal name is significant as it is possibly etymologically connected to the word for 'silver' in both Celtic and in Greek. Elsewhere, Herodotus also connects Tartessos to immense wealth in metals (4.152):

> *an easterly wind drove them [the Samians] from their course, and did not abate until they had passed through the Pillars of Heracles and came providentially to Tartessos. Now this was at that time an untapped market; hence, the Samians, of all the Greeks whom we know with certainty, brought back from it the greatest profit on their wares except Sostratus of Aegina, son of Laodamas; no one could compete with him.*

Regardless of whether Arganthonios was a Greek moniker for the king of a land known for its silver resources or was an adaptation by Greeks of a local Celtic personal name, Anacreon's pithy jesting and Herodotus' account offer testimony to the associations of Tartessos with silver. In all its mythical allusions, this early Greek poetry speaks volumes as to the mineral riches of the region.

That Tartessos was a river for Stesichorus and a kingdom for Herodotus is not contradictory by Greek cartographic nomenclature in colonial landscapes (e.g. Gela, the colony in Sicily, is named after the nearby river Gelas). By the Roman period, the river was known as Baetis, the modern Río Guadalquivir, which flows through Seville, Phoenician Spal, and into the Gulf of Cádiz. Spal would have been founded on the margins of the ancient Sinus Tartessicus, a marine gulf dotted with new Phoenician colonies and sanctuaries, where the river discharged, now taken up by wetlands. Opposite it, separated by an inlet, lay the multi-period, large sanctuary on the hill of Carambolo, probably dedicated to Astarte, as suggested by the discovery of an inscribed votive statuette, and famous for the 'treasure' found there, an assortment of elaborately wrought golden jewels, locally-made with the eastern techniques of filigree and granula-



A map showing some of the major Phoenician settlements on and around the Iberian Peninsula. Drawn by the promise of rich metal deposits, Phoenicians settled the Iberian coast, facilitating the transport of metals back east to the Levant.

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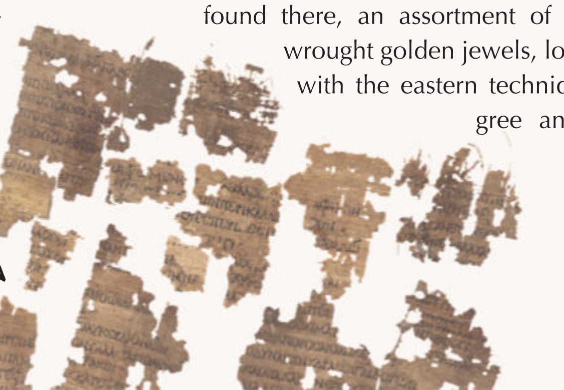

A papyrus fragment containing part of the poem *Geryoneis*, composed by Steisichorus, who was active ca. 630–555 BC.

© Oxyrynchus Database

A bronze representation of the Phoenician goddess Astarte, dated to the seventh century BC.

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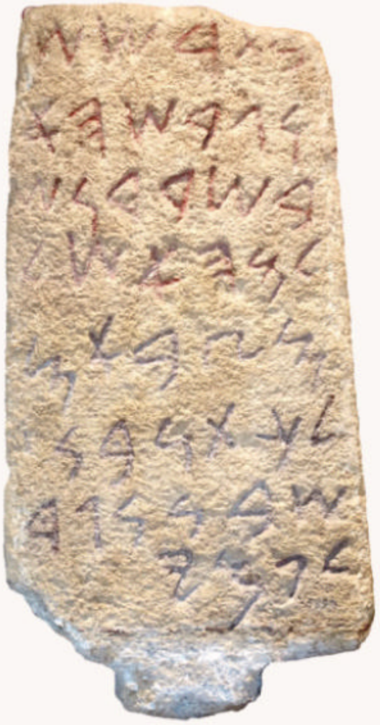

An inscribed block, dated to ca. 800 BC, known as the Nora Stone, erected on the south coast of Sardinia. It is believed to be the oldest surviving Phoenician inscription. One reading of the Nora Stone suggests that it refers to Tarshish, which has been identified as Tartessos from Greco-Roman sources.

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tion, and infused with cultic significance (e.g. the oxhide-shaped pectoral reproduces the oxhide-shaped altars of sanctuaries in Iberia, of ultimately a Mesopotamian or Hittite religious/mythical significance).

A literal interpretation of Greek poetic verses would place Tartessos opposite Erytheia (Cádiz). But that is based on the understanding that Tartessos was a city, a town, or a state, physically delimited in a clear way, which is a leap of faith. Instead, archaeological excavations are bringing to light numerous new settlements and sanctuaries on the coast of the former gulf or by rivers, colonial or strongly ‘Orientalizing’ in their architecture and material culture, which points towards Tartessos being a region, one under rapid urbanization spurred by colonization, rather than a state. By that geographical reckoning, Tartessos was located on the edge of the Pyrite Belt, the richest metallogenic region in Europe, extending from Seville to Alentejo. Exploited continuously since the second millennium BC, it has yielded archaeological evidence for the mining and the smelting of ores. The Phoenicians had a significant logistical operation for transporting ores from mines to dedicated smelting sites, before transporting the processed metals down fluvial waterways to the sea for onward marine transport. Research has demonstrated that the Phoenicians initially tapped into an earlier, local system of exploiting the metalliferous region, although it is clear that the Phoenician layer introduced new mining techniques for extracting silver from argentiferous jarosite deposits.

Tarshish and Tartessos

That the Tartessos of the Greek sources was the Tarshish of the Hebrew Bible, a land rich in precious metals, has been the subject of controversy, though it was already postulated by the eighth-century-AD Byzantine scholar Georgios Synkellos, in his *Chronicle of Eusebios*. Variably denoting a personal name, a gem, a land, and a fleet of ships connected to that land (e.g. Isaiah 23:6; Ezekiel 27:12; II Chronicles 9:21), Tarshish is more famously understood as a distant place to which a joint fleet of King Solomon and King Hiram of Tyre sailed in the tenth century BC, wherefrom they returned in the third year, bringing “gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks” (I Kings 10:22).

Given some tenth-century BC radiocarbon dates from early Phoenician contexts in Huelva, this identification of Tarshish with Tartessos is archaeologically possible. Additionally, extra-biblical sources for Tarshish have supported this identification. One conten-

A bronze jug, dated to the seventh century BC, that was discovered in Huelva, ancient Onuba, an important site of the Tartessic culture.

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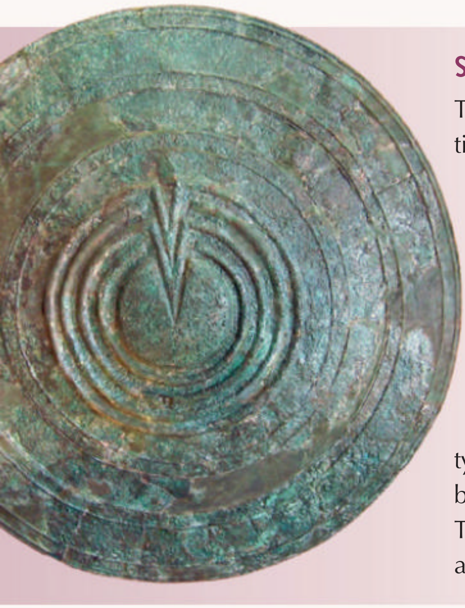

A miniature votive bronze V-notch shield dedicated at Delphi, dated to the late eighth century BC. Actual V-notched shields and their representations, predating this example, are known from Ireland and the Iberian Peninsula respectively, suggesting that the design was carried from Iberia into the wider Mediterranean.

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Shipping shields overseas

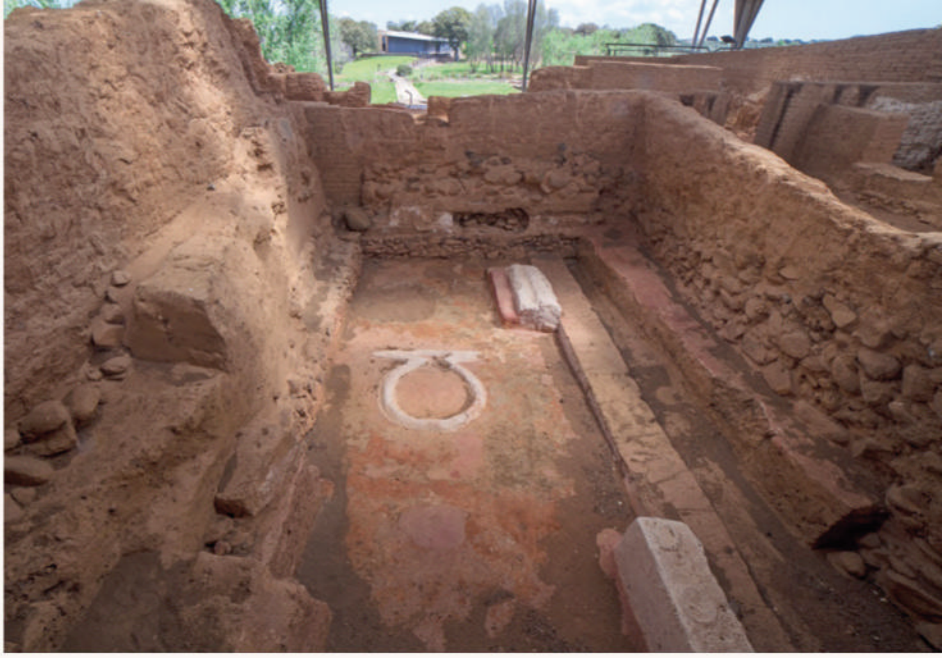
There is increasing evidence for Iberian maritime networks pre-dating the arrival of the Phoenicians. This is best exemplified by the appearance of V-notched shields in Ireland, the Iberian Peninsula, and the eastern Mediterranean. A round leather shield decorated with concentric ribs around a central boss, bearing a V-shaped notch on the outer rib, was preserved in an Irish bog (Clonbrin, Co. Offaly), and two wooden moulds for this type were found elsewhere, with a radiocarbon-date of 1300–1000 BC for one of them. The V-notch decoration with concentric ribs also appears on Cypro-Geometric III (850–725 BC) bronze shields from tombs in Cyprus and is replicated in miniature votive shields, of clay or copper, dedicated at Aegean sanctuaries in the seventh century BC. The same shield design is used on western Iberian ‘warrior *stelae*’, along with a variety of objects of eastern Mediterranean origin, such as the lyre. As a spatial intermediary between the Irish and Cypriot examples, Iberia was more than likely involved in the spread of this design to the eastern Mediterranean. So, interregional trade between the eastern Mediterranean and Iberia had clearly predated the Phoenicians, but was this down to a pre-existing, independent Tartessos?

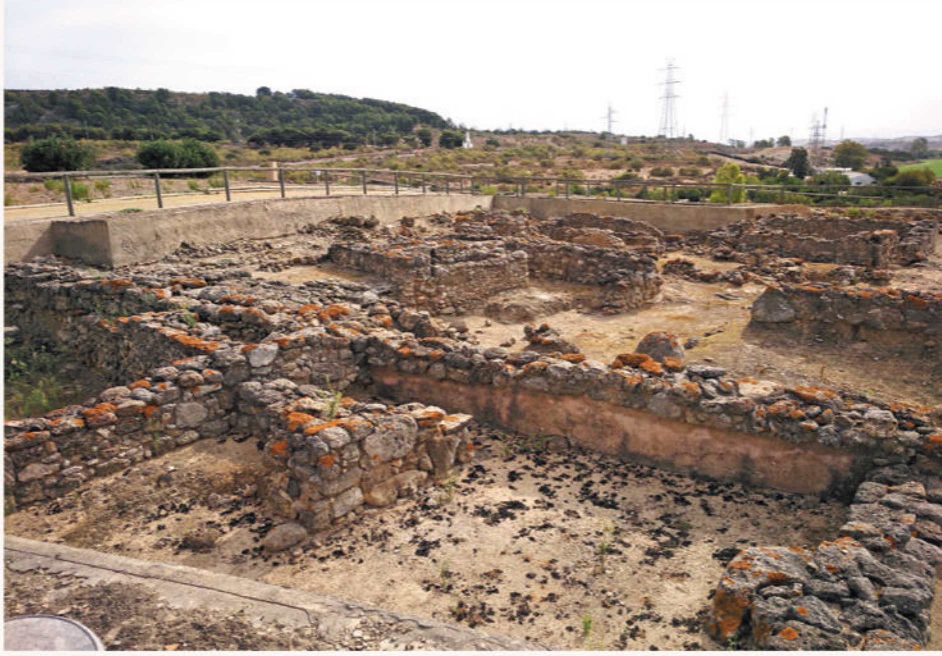
tious reading of a Phoenician inscription on a stele from Nora in Sardinia posits that it commemorated the crew of a ship finding refuge in Sardinia after leaving Tarshish (whether from a storm or an adversary force is unclear). More recently, further arguments using other evidence have been proposed for the identification of Tartessos with Tarshish. Firstly, one of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon's inscriptions claimed control over distant lands, including Tarsisi, equated with Tartessos, suggesting that Assyria laid territorial claims over Tyre's distant commercial network by the seventh century BC. Secondly, a Hebrew inscription on an ostracon preserving the phrase 'silver of Tarshish' in relation to taxation for the temple of Jerusalem (dated to between the ninth and the seventh century BC) is thought to refer to Tartessos, given that silver from sites in Israel has been mineralogically traced to Iberian ores. Finally, scholars have recently postulated that both Tartessos and Tarshish derive from the same stem (**tart*/**turt*/**turd*), a productive root for toponyms and ethnonyms in southern Iberia as known from Greco-Roman sources, such as the Turduli and Turdetani.

Models of interactions

Whether Tartessos existed prior to the Phoenicians' arrival or was a symptom of Phoenician colonization currently divides opinions. Their arrival, with its mass-scale settlement, certainly shifted the power dynamics, but what degree of power the colonists had in the exploitation and ownership of the resources is a matter of contention between those who see Tartessos as a pre-existing indigenous state in contact with Phoenician colonists, or a new culture, inextricably linked to the Phoenician stimuli and diffused through dozens of cities, towns, and sanctuaries, not necessarily under the same political authority. The stance one takes on this matter, for example, would colour their interpretation of Huelva (known in antiquity as Onuba) as a local town or as a Phoenician colony developing on an earlier town. Similarly, the multi-period sanctuary at Carambolo is deemed Tartessic by some and Phoenician by others. Major Phoenician colonies were founded all across the shores of southern Spain, in several cases atop earlier habitations. Exactly how this shift in settlement patterns occurred, whether peacefully, through commercial acumen, or violently, is difficult to say, though the prospect of organizing armies from the other end of the Mediterranean and militarily pushing the locals out is an untenable hypothesis. **AH**

Eleftheria Pappa is an archaeologist with a specialization in western Phoenician colonization and in classical Greek culture. She holds a doctorate in archaeology from the University of Oxford, and has researched and/or taught archaeology at universities and research institutes in the UK, Netherlands, Germany, Brazil, Spain, and the United States.





(Top) **An excavated room with an altar at the archaeological site known as Cancho Roano, which is believed to have been a sanctuary associated with the Tartessic culture.**

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(Bottom) **A section of the excavated ruins at the archaeological site of Doña Blanca, an artificial mound with the remains of a Phoenician city, including walls, houses, and a necropolis, dated to the eighth to third centuries BC. The site is in the vicinity of Cádiz, the site of the Phoenician colony of Gadir. This part of the Iberian Peninsula was heavily settled by the Phoenicians, and a central region of the Tartessic culture.**

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A gold belt, known as the Melqart Belt. Dated to the seventh to sixth centuries BC, it was part of the Treasure of Aliseda, a hoard of gold, silver, bronze, and glass objects, dated to ca. 700–250 BC.

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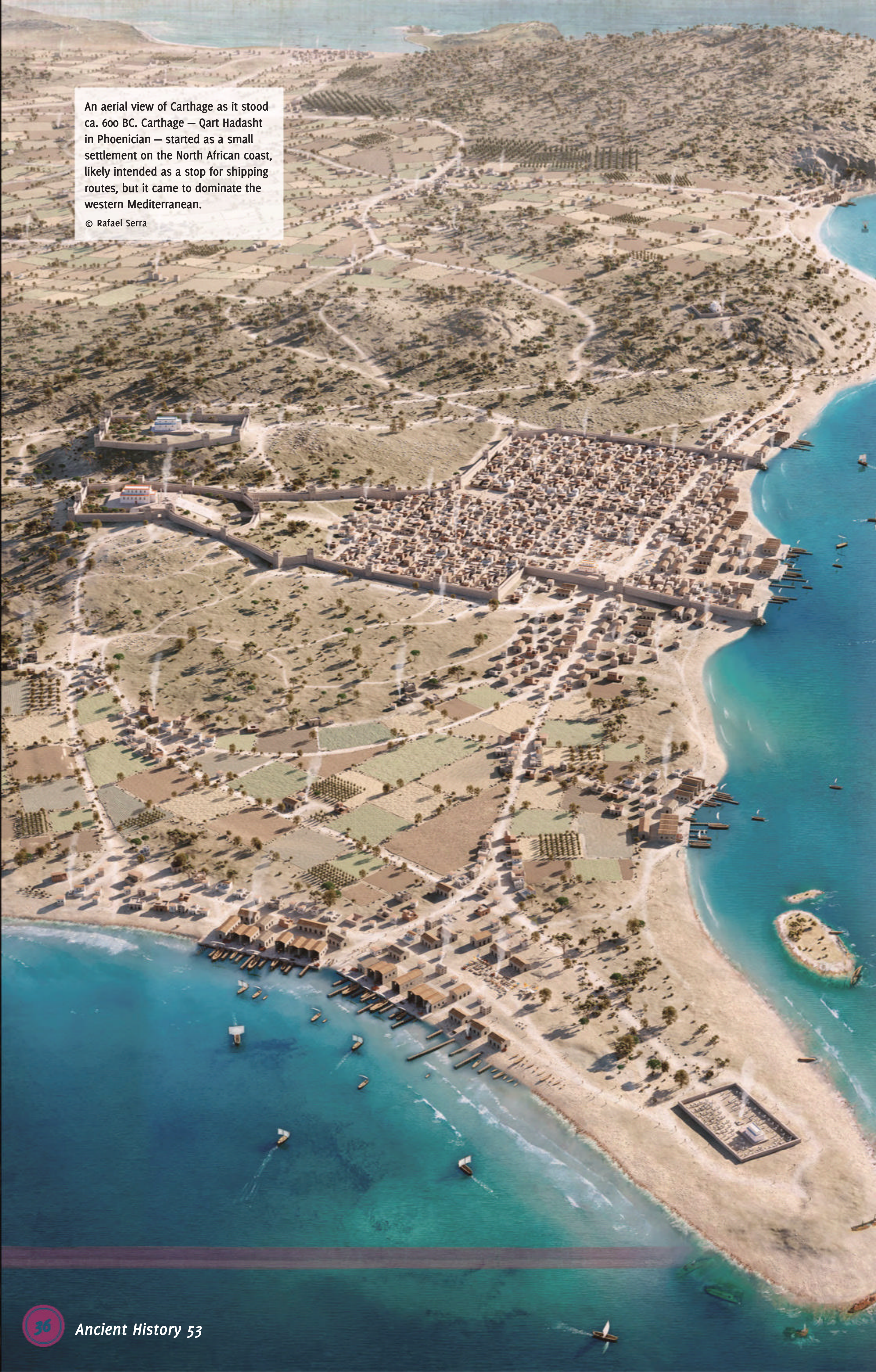

An aerial view of Carthage as it stood ca. 600 BC. Carthage — Qart Hadasht in Phoenician — started as a small settlement on the North African coast, likely intended as a stop for shipping routes, but it came to dominate the western Mediterranean.

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THEME

EARLY HISTORY AND LEGENDS

PHOENICIAN CARTHAGE

By Iván Fumadó Ortega

Carthage was an intriguing city, praised by many as the wealthiest in the world and feared by others as a threat to Rome's dominance. Its brutal destruction in 146 BC, following a three-year siege led by Scipio Aemilianus, marked an end to the Punic Wars (264–146 BC). This event, with the loss of Carthaginian libraries, gave the Romans also the freedom to re-write the city's history. For centuries, our understanding of Carthage has relied on later Roman accounts, but decades of archaeological research are now helping us to uncover the true nature of this magnificent ancient city.

Carthage stands out as the most important Phoenician settlement in the ancient Mediterranean. The Phoenicians were ahead of the Greeks in exploring the seas and engaging with local communities in North Africa and southern Europe. They significantly contributed to the spread of key techniques that led to the beginning of the so-called Axial Age around the sixth century BC, like literacy, iron metallurgy, the much-resistant wheel-made pottery, and the intensive farming of olive trees and vineyards. Additionally, they played a role in the spread of domesticated animals, like donkeys and chickens, that were unknown in the western Mediterranean and improved rural living conditions.

The Phoenicians were not a unified group like the Egyptians, Assyrians, or Romans. They never formed a single state, empire, or nation called Phoenicia. Instead, they appear to be a mix of independent cities that share a similar lifestyle, traditions, religion, trading space, and most importantly, the same alphabet and language. Interestingly, the English term 'Phoenician' doesn't come from that Semitic language but from the Greek word 'Phoenix', which had various meanings, including 'purple' and 'palm tree'. In ancient Greece, this term might have been a clever, maybe funny way to refer to the foreigners living along the coast of what is now southern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine — the home of palm trees and purple clothes — at least from the ancient Greeks' point of view.

Phoenician expansion

The collapse of the Assyrian Empire and the weakening of the last Ramesside rulers at the end of the second millennium BC created a power vacuum in the Near East. This situation allowed the independent Phoenician cities to form urban monarchies, eventually a kind of 'proto-polis'. These communities were leaders in developing both medium and long-distance seafaring, at that time without a clear distinction between commercial and military purposes. Sidon, Arwad, Byblos, and Tyre were some of the most prominent urban monarchies in this context. Their maritime supremacy and population growth prompted them to launch a colonization initiative along their western trade routes, establishing settlements in Cyprus, Crete, Malta, Sicily, Sardinia, the central Maghreb, southern Spain, and even the Atlantic coasts of Morocco and Portugal. Notable modern cities like Palermo, Cagliari, Málaga, Seville, and Cádiz are Phoenician foundations that have remained significant regional capitals to this day.

Some ancient historians assigned legendary dates to the founding of those cities, like Gadir (the Phoenician name of modern Cádiz), which the Augustan historian Velleius Paterculus claimed was established around 1100 BC. For many years, archaeological excavations have provided much later dates for most Phoenician settlements in the Mediterranean. Today, experts agree that a significant population movement likely didn't occur until the eighth century BC. Then, in the following two centuries, the expansion of these new settlements led to the creation of others, such as those on the island of Ibiza or that of Kerkouane, in the Tunisian Cap Bon. However, recent excavations in some Phoenician colonies have uncovered archaeological remains that, when analyzed using radiocarbon dating (C14), suggest they date back to the tenth and ninth centuries BC. That is the case, for example, in Huelva (on the Spanish South Atlantic coast, dated 934–826 BC), El Carambolo (a sanctuary near Seville, dated 944–843 BC), La Rebanadilla (near Málaga airport, dated 971–936 BC), and Utica (in northern Tunisia, dated 981–903 BC). Carthage, on the other hand, seems to be part of a second wave of Tyrian foundations that were established at the very end of the ninth century BC.

The site of Carthage is situated at the tip of a small peninsula that juts out about 9 km east into the sea north of Tunisia, close to the country's current capital. Over the past two centuries, this landscape has undergone significant changes. The two lagoons located to the north and south of the archaeological site were open to the sea in ancient times. This allowed the city to have several natural harbors, each with different exposure to winds and currents, which could be used based on varying sailing conditions. Even more crucial was the geostrategic location of this peninsula: it was halfway along the 2000 nautical miles (ca. 3700 km) route between the Strait of Gibraltar and the Phoenician coast, making it an ideal stopover for Phoenician ships travelling along the Mediterranean network. Additionally, on a more regional scale, it lies right between the mouths of Tunisia's two most important rivers, the Medjerda and the Miliane, which are about 60 km apart and still serve as key land communication routes in the country today. This prime location must have provided the new settlement with excellent connections and control over long-distance maritime routes and medium-range land paths.

The foundation myths of Carthage

The intricate political life of a city like Carthage, filled with influential families competing for power and wealth, must have led to the creation of various founding myths that acted as political propaganda for these rival groups. Only two of these myths have survived to this day, thanks to some vague mentions by Greek and Roman historians. The details of the first myth are largely unknown, but it describes the city's founding by two male figures, Zoros and Karchedon, who seem to be, because of their names, personifications of the cities of Tyre and Carthage. This narrative likely emphasized heroic masculinity, reinforcing the connection between the Phoenician mother city and the Carthaginians settlers while minimizing, or even ignoring, the role played by indigenous people in the city's establishment and growth. Nowadays, colonial studies are aware of the crucial contribution of local populations for almost all successful colonial settlements, both in terms of workforce and reproduction capacity and agricultural knowhow.

The second myth, famously captured by Virgil in the *Aeneid*, provides us with a lot more details, although these have likely been heavily adapted to fit the tastes, expectations, and needs of the Roman audience during the Augustan era. In this captivating tale, Carthage is depicted as a city under construction, led by Princess Dido (also known as Elyssa). She had fled her Phoenician homeland of Tyre after a palace conspiracy in which her brother killed her husband. The princess managed to escape with the enormous treasure from the main temple of the city, dedicated to the god Melqart (the Greek Heracles and Roman Hercules), along with a group of loyal senators. After a strategic stop in Cyprus, where 50 young virgins were recruited, the group set off to establish the 'new city'. In fact, the English name Carthage comes from the Latin 'Karthago', which in turn derives from the Phoenician term 'Qrt hdšt' (anglicized as Qart Hadasht), meaning 'new city'.

One of the most intriguing aspects of this myth is the relationship between the Phoenician princess and the indigenous North African people, the Maxitani. They agreed to sell the princess a piece of land not greater than a cowhide (usually about 5 m^2). But she ordered the cowhide to be cut into a single very thin strip, which ended up covering a much larger area. Mathematically, if the Phoenician newcomers sacrificed their biggest bull for the occasion and managed to cut the strip to no more than half a centimeter wide, they could have obtained a leather strip of just over a kilometer long, encompassing between 6 and 8 hectares of land. The Romans probably didn't bother with this calculation, but the outcome didn't really matter: the point of the story was linking the character of the Carthaginians with female intelligence and cunning. When Iarbas, the stunned king of the Maxitani, wanted to marry Dido, she initially agreed. However, once again, this was nothing but a ploy by the princess. Dido was only trying to buy time to plan a dramatic suicide that would show her loyalty to Sychaeus, her first husband (according to Virgil), King of Tyre, and priest of Melqart's temple. Whether true or not, the portrayal of these female stereotypes (intelligence, cunning, beauty, chastity) fits perfectly into the patriarchal mindset of Roman society at Virgil's time, where feminizing a rival meant degrading them.

Early Carthaginian archaeology

Since the early 1800s, archaeologists, particularly from France, have been digging at the spot where Carthage once stood. Their initial efforts lacked proper methods, but over the years, they developed a more systematic approach, particularly during the UNESCO campaign *Pour sauver Carthage* from 1974 to 1994, which aimed to enhance archaeological research with teams from several countries. Today, although

Libyphoenicians

Ancient accounts of colonization tend to place the indigenous inhabitants of the area in competition – if not open conflict – with the colonizers. Consequently, ancient colonies can seem ethnically homogenous, distinct from the surrounding populations. However, the archaeology of ancient colonies tends to demonstrate some form of cultural exchange, such as the presence of locally-made fibulae in graves, for example, which has previously been taken to demonstrate the existence of Greek-Sicilian marriages in Sicily, although this is based on the notion that pots – or fibulae, in this case – equal people. In later Greek and Roman sources, the Phoenician colonies were typically referred to as being Libyphoenician (e.g. Polybius, 3.33; Strabo, 17.3.19), suggesting a degree of intermixing between locals and incomers substantial enough to leave an observable mark. Interestingly, Carthage is not referred to as Libyphoenician. Diodorus even notes that the Carthaginians were simply Phoenicians, while also that they intermarried with Libyphoenicians (20.55.4). However, it is more likely that the Carthaginians were also a mix of locals and Phoenicians, much like the other Phoenician colonies, but that they were a significant enough presence in the western Mediterranean to be known by the name of their city.

international cooperation continues, Tunisian archaeologists are contributing or leading in all excavation projects.

The ruins are scattered across a coastal plain surrounded by gentle hills, two of which are home to the Tunisian Presidential Palace and the National Museum of Carthage. On that second hill, known in antiquity as Byrsa (which means 'cowhide' in Greek and 'fortress' in some Semitic languages), some of the oldest remains have been recently discovered, dating back to the late ninth century BC, found in the fill layers of a tomb's structure. The earliest domestic layers in Carthage date from the second quarter of the eighth century BC. The oldest documented religious activity comes from the Baal-Hammon sanctuary, the so-called 'Tophet', which dates to the latter half of the eighth century BC, although this level seems to cover earlier, unidentified activities.

The Bible does mention the Tophet as a site where children were reportedly burned in a ritual sacrifice (for instance, in Jeremiah 7:30–34). However, archaeologists have not come to a clear agreement about the types of rituals that occurred in this open-air sanctuary dedicated to the Phoenician deities Baal-Hammon and Tanit (male and female, respectively). Numerous urns have been discovered there since 1921, containing the burned remains of fetuses, newborns, and children, sometimes substituted or accompanied by the remains of goats or birds. The crucial discussion is whether these children were already dead when they were offered or if they were actually sacrificed in life, as some anti-Carthaginian propaganda, from authors like Diodorus Siculus and Silius Italicus, suggest (see Hußmann,*AH* 12). Ongoing excavations and modern analysis are working to provide answers to this sensitive debate (although the Greeks and Romans themselves also practiced human sacrifice on some extreme occasions).

Initially, the city probably resembled a makeshift camp, but around 750 BC a system was put in place to organize the urban soil into rectangular plots, each just under 100 m^2. The blocks to be built were long and narrow, with many small lanes about 3 m wide running parallel to each other, intersecting with wider streets that acted as main roads linking the beach at the east to the inland areas in the west. The houses that have been excavated, totaling some dozens, are relatively basic but reflect the common layout of Phoenician households, typically consisting of three to five connected rectangular rooms, possibly including a small courtyard with a well and an access to a flat rooftop. When the city began to prosper significantly, at the end of the sixth and in the fifth century BC onwards, a new beachside neighbourhood was created including 250 m2 and 600 m2 large villas, where columned porticoes, private latrines, and other comforts could be found.

Surrounding this dense downtown was a periphery with more open spaces, mainly used for cemeteries and workplaces. From the very beginning, the Carthaginians seemed to have set up their workshops here for the typical Phoenician activity of dyeing with purple, thanks to the fluids extracted from a specific mollusk, the 'murex brandaris'. Archaeologists have discovered significant amounts of crushed shells of this mollusk among the oldest waste layers at the site. There are also many remains of ashes, charcoal, furnaces, and tuyeres, which indicate metalworking activities involving iron and bronze. Several pottery workshops have been found in the southern and northern parts of this 'industrial' area. None of these workshops have ever been located within the central area, which appears to have been reserved for homes and sanctuaries.

Another significant feature of the Carthaginian periphery was the necropoleis, which were located on the hills that encircled the city. These cemeteries included different types of burials: excavations there have uncovered cinerary urns containing the remains of adults as well as inhumations. These could be very simple or more elaborate, with some of them being large underground structures containing one or several wooden or stone sarcophagi. The most elaborate tombs, which required considerable resources to be made, sometimes dug a more than ten meters deep shaft into the hillside before leading to the burial chamber. Within these chambers, called 'hypogea', a variety of common items accompanying the deceased were typically found, such as the necessary utensils for a (this time everlasting) banquet: a water and a wine jug, a cup, some plates, a lamp, some perfume, and possibly some jewelry or personal care items like combs, make up, shaving razors, etc. It is very uncommon to find weapons in the graves of Carthage.

The exact layout of the city's oldest fortifications is not well documented. However, in the fifth century BC, a massive maritime wall was constructed along the beach, which likely also defended part of the inner perimeter. This fifth century marked a pivotal moment in the city's history, after the Phoenician motherland's control came to an end when Tyre was taken by the Persian king Cyrus the Great in 539 BC. Even after facing a defeat against Syracuse in 480 BC, Carthage appears to have built strong diplomatic, economic, and possibly military connections in western Sicily, southern Sardinia, and northern Tunisia, establishing the agricultural and demographic foundations for the powerful state that could create the first overseas province, the so-called *epikráteia*, that possibly inspired Rome toward its imperial ambitions.

The loss of Carthaginian written sources and the destruction of the city in 146 BC meant that less attention has been given to the study of Carthage compared to Greek and Roman cities. This has created a tragic and mysterious image of its history, along with some anti-Carthaginian biases. Still, Phoenician Carthage should be recognized as one of the most developed civilizations in the ancient Mediterranean. **AH**

Dr. Iván Fumadó Ortega is a Professor at the University of Valencia (Spain), and cooperates with the Tunisian INP in research projects focused on economic and demographic dynamics between Punic and Roman times.

The ruins of the Large Temple of Kition on Cyprus. A settlement existed here in the Late Bronze Age, but it was later settled by people from Tyre, establishing a permanent Phoenician presence on the island.

THEME

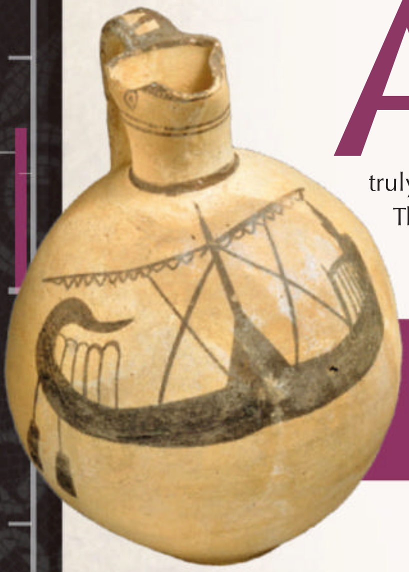
TYRE'S CONTROL OVER CYPRUS

TRICKY IMPERIAL ENTANGLEMENTS

By Owain Williams

Cyprus was an important node in the Phoenicians' Mediterranean network, as well as a critical source of copper. It is no surprise that the city state of Tyre established a form of hegemony over the island in the Early Iron Age. However, Tyre's control over Cyprus may have ultimately led to the city's decline.

After the Late Bronze Age Collapse, the Phoenicians had been in contact with Cyprus since the second half of the tenth century BC, if such contact had been truly severed at all. This is hardly a surprise. The Phoenicians, after all, were a seaward-looking people; with the Mount Lebanon range prohibiting eastward, landward travel, the Phoenicians could only really expand into the sea.



A Cypriot jug, dated to ca. 750 - 600 BC, depicting a ship. Cyprus was an important node in the Phoenicians' pan-Mediterranean networks, leading Tyre to exert direct control over the island.

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Phoenician Cyprus?

From the tenth century BC, a Phoenician presence can be discerned on Cyprus. Around this time, the Phoenicians were beginning to explore further into the Mediterranean and the Aegean; Near Eastern imports begin to appear at Lefkandi, an archaeological site on Euboea, and numerous Greek goods have been found at Tyre.

From the early ninth century BC, under Ithobaal I, Tyre began to expand its territorial holdings in the Levant. In the Old Testament, Ithobaal – known as Ethbaal – is called the king of Sidon (I Kings 16:31), while Sidon also disappears from Assyrian inscriptions, suggesting it had been taken over by Tyre. The ninth century also saw the expansion of the Phoenicians throughout the Mediterranean, with the foundation of important colonies, such as Carthage and Motya (see Ortega, this issue). It is at this time that Kition, the first permanent Phoenician settlement on Cyprus, is founded.

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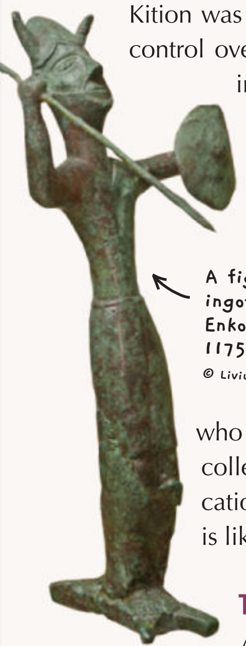
DID YOU KNOW?

Cyprus has been known by many names in antiquity. In the Bronze Age, it was known as Alashiya. However, by the Early Iron Age, it was known to the Assyrians as Iadnana, a combination of Ia' and Adnana (also written as Yadnana). The first element of this name, Ia', is a west Semitic word that likely means 'island'. Adnana is possibly connected to the Denyen, one of the infamous Sea Peoples, and the *dnnym*, who are recorded as inhabiting Cilicia in the eighth century. Thus, the island was known to the Assyrians as, effectively, the Island of the Adnanaens.

Just as the Phoenicians' expansion throughout the Mediterranean was, in part, driven by a desire for metals, it seems that Kition was founded to establish some sort of control over the island's copper sources. An inscription from Limassol, located between the territories of the Cypriot kingdoms of Amathus and Kourion, on the southwest part of the island, dated to the eighth century BC, records the presence of a governor of Qart Hadasht (Phoenician for 'new city'), who may have been responsible for the collection of this copper. While the location of Qart Hadasht is uncertain, it is likely referring to Kition.



A figurine of the ingot god from Enkomi, dated to 1175-1050 BC.

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Turbulent vassals

According to the Annals of Sargon II, Tyre considered the polities of Cyprus to be their vassals. However, ironically, this same inscription may record the ending of Tyre's control over Cyprus, which was replaced by direct Assyrian control. The Annals tell us that one Shilta of Tyre (whose name means 'potentate') approached Sargon II for military aid after the kings of the island of Ia' stopped paying tribute, likely in 708 BC, and Sargon II sent his royal guard. Unfortunately, the Annals are very fragmentary, so we must rely on the Stele of Sargon II, a black basalt victory stele commemorating Sargon II's victory over the Cypriots that was likely set up in Kition, to fill in the gaps. The appearance of Assyrian forces was, apparently, enough for the Cypriots to sue for peace, approaching Sargon II directly.

A Phoenician bowl discovered on Cyprus, dated to ca. 710-675 BC. It combines various Phoenician and Egyptian motifs.

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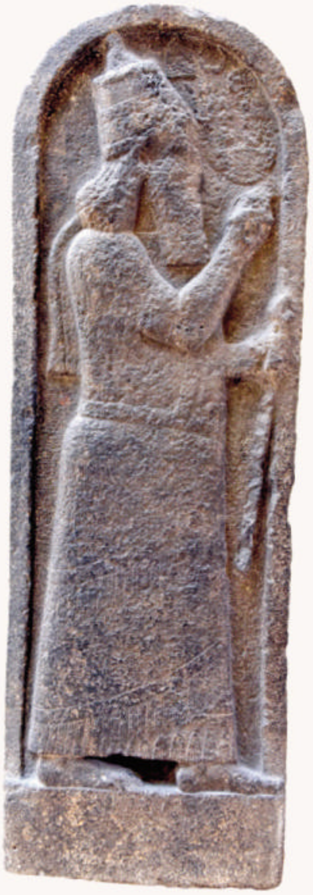
This inscription, notably, makes no mention of a Shilta of Tyre. This has led some to suspect that, after the Assyrian army defeated the Cypriots, they became direct Assyrian vassals, not sub-vassals of Tyre. Indeed, the Annals of Esarhaddon, written several decades later, report how the Cypriots sent materials to aid in the renovation of the Assyrian palace at Kalhu, with no mention of Tyre, suggesting a more direct relationship between the two. However, as the Assyrians had no significant navy, they must have relied on Phoenician ships to maintain their control over Cyprus. Moreover, there is a distinct lack of evidence, besides the Stele of Sargon II, of an Assyrian presence on the island, suggesting the resident Phoenicians may have even enforced Assyrian rule.

The Assyrians' taking control of Cyprus from Tyre may have, in part, contributed to the Tyrians' role in the widespread revolts following the death of Sargon II in 705 BC. When Sennacherib, Sargon II's successor, approached, king Luli of Sidon – who may have been the same man as Shilta of Tyre – fled into the sea. He was replaced by Tuba'lu, a pro-Assyrian king, who was also given the lands of Tyre, suggesting that, despite being called king of Sidon, Luli was king of both Tyre and Sidon. Regardless, this revolt effectively marked the end of Tyre's relative independence under the Assyrians. **AH**

***Owain Williams is the Editor of* Ancient History Magazine.**



The so-called Sargon Stele, dated to ca. 707 BC, records the defeat of the Cypriots by the Assyrian king Sargon II. While the stele was likely set up in Kition, a Phoenician colony, it may have represented Assyrian control of the island.

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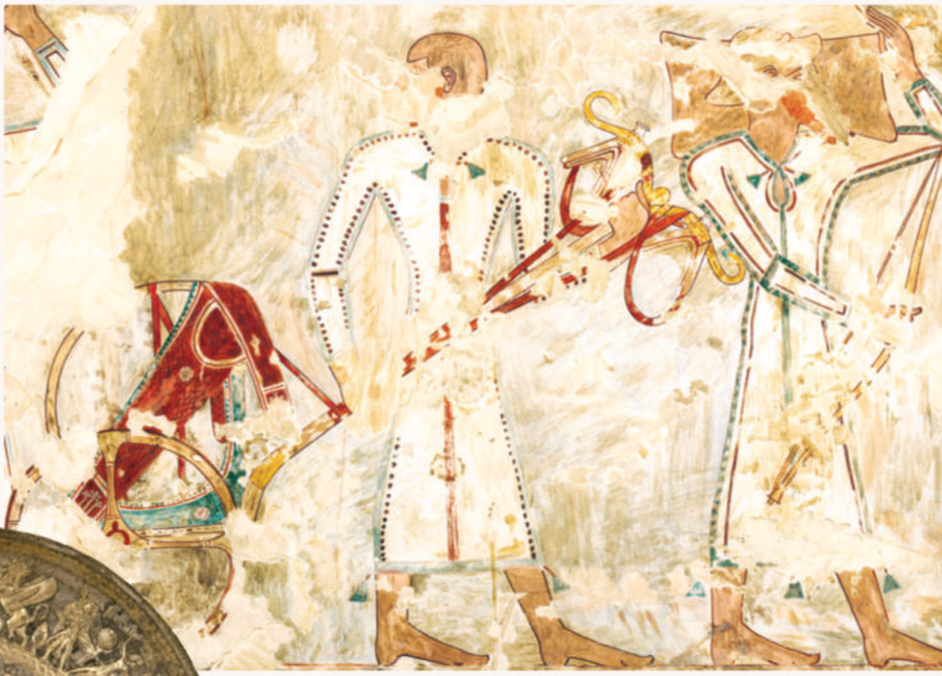

A facsimile of a wall painting from the Tomb of Rekhmire in Thebes, originally dated to ca. 1504-1425 BC. It depicts several Syrians bringing offerings, such as a metal ingot. Copper, a key ingredient of bronze, was a valuable resource in antiquity, and Cyprus had significant deposits.

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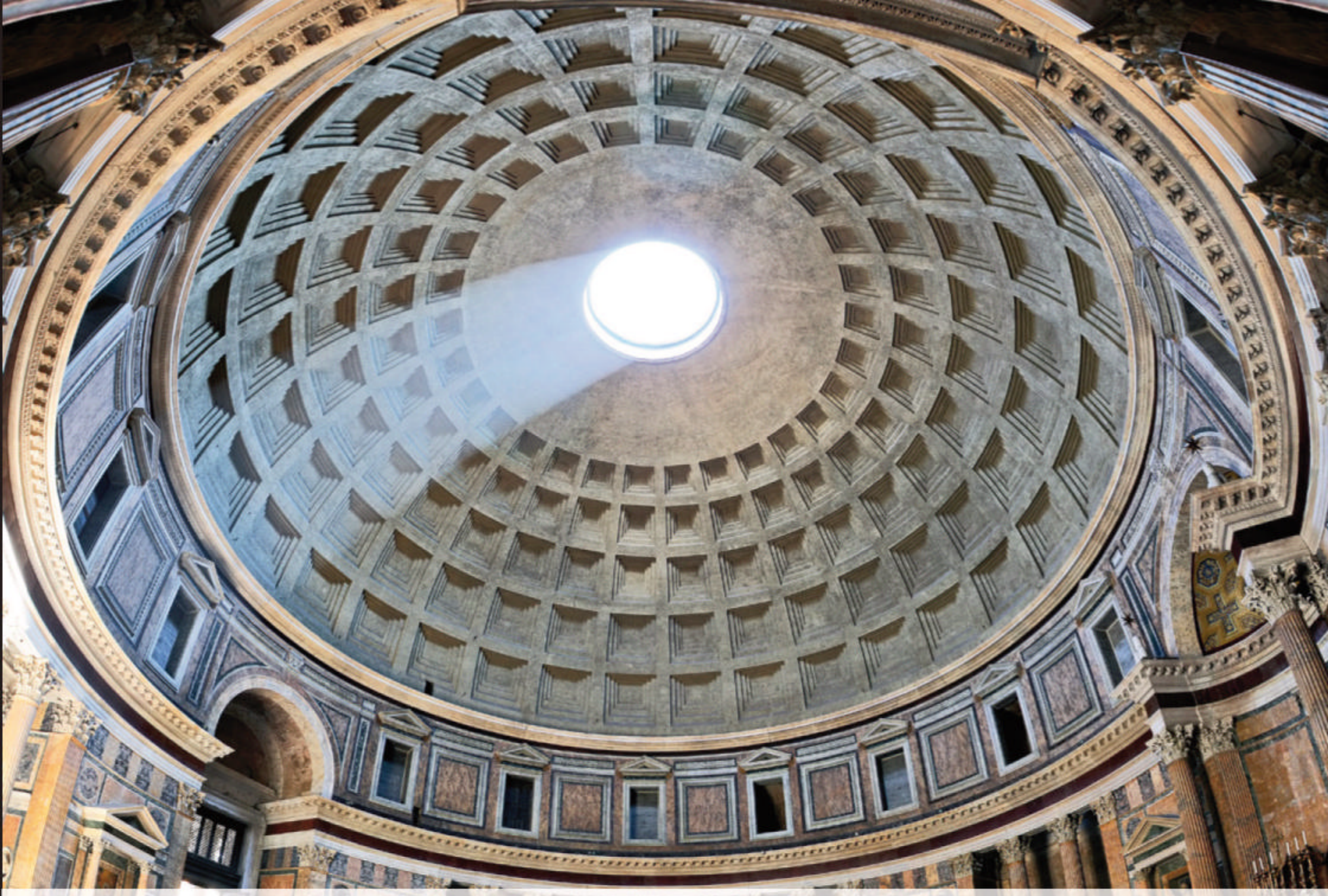


A view of the dome of the Pantheon with the *oculus*. First constructed by Agrippa during the reign of Augustus, the temple was later rebuilt by the emperor Hadrian in AD 110. It is an extraordinary example of the precision of Roman engineering.

MEASUREMENTS AND MATHEMATICS IN ANCIENT ROME

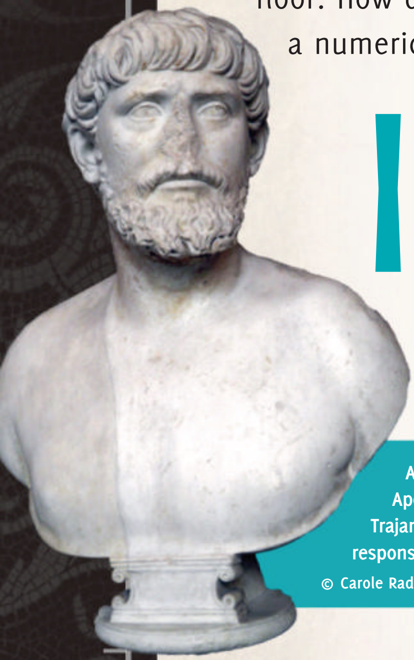
By Philip Matyszak

PRACTICAL-MINDED MASTERS

Today, the Pantheon is considered a marvel of engineering. It has the largest unsupported concrete dome ever built – and so well built that it has survived the last 1900 years with minimal maintenance. So precise are the dimensions of the dome that if a sphere of 4330 cm were inserted under the dome it would fit exactly on all sides, its bottom only two cm short of the floor. How did the Romans achieve these effects without the use of computers and with a numerical system that made any form of advanced mathematics almost impossible?

It is impossible to manage precise feats of engineering without an equally precise system of measurement and the mathematics to turn those measurements into something coherent. Thankfully, the Romans have left texts showing their homework. For example, the technicalities of constructing a building that will stand for the next two millennia are laid out in the *De Architectura* of Vitruvius.

The practical-minded Romans did not indulge in the joys of pure mathematics for its own sake as the Greeks did. Nevertheless, when the Romans needed Greek mathematics they freely used the discipline – or simply used the Greeks who did. Apollodorus of Damascus was the designer of the Pantheon in Rome, and he indulged in even more complex mathematics in his treatise on siege engines. His *Poliorcetica* explains both the business of hurling heavy objects along precise trajectories and that of building huge towers that could be wheeled against city walls.



A marble bust, dated to AD 130-140, believed to represent Apollodorus of Damascus, the architect of the Roman emperors Trajan and Hadrian. Architects were important in ancient Rome, responsible for the creation of important infrastructure.

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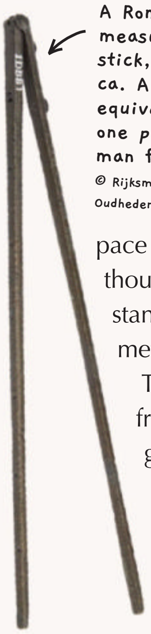
The Romans were as meticulous at measuring their physical world as they were in measuring time. Roman water clocks are marvels of mechanical engineering. As the Roman 'day' was twelve hours long from dusk to dawn, no matter what the season, a Roman clock had to gradually increase and decrease the hours of the day between the sixteen (modern) hours of a midsummer day and the ten hours of midwinter.

Measuring distance

As with the Roman day, most Roman units of measure were based on the number twelve, this number being divisible by two, six, three, four, and itself. For example, we can thank the Romans for the twelve inches (*unicae*) in a foot (*pes*). From there we get the *passus* – one pace – which was five *pedes* in length. One thousand (*mille*) paces give us the mile – the standard measure of distance until the kilometre appeared in the early modern era.



A Roman measuring stick, dated to ca. AD 1-300, equivalent to one *pes*, a Roman foot.

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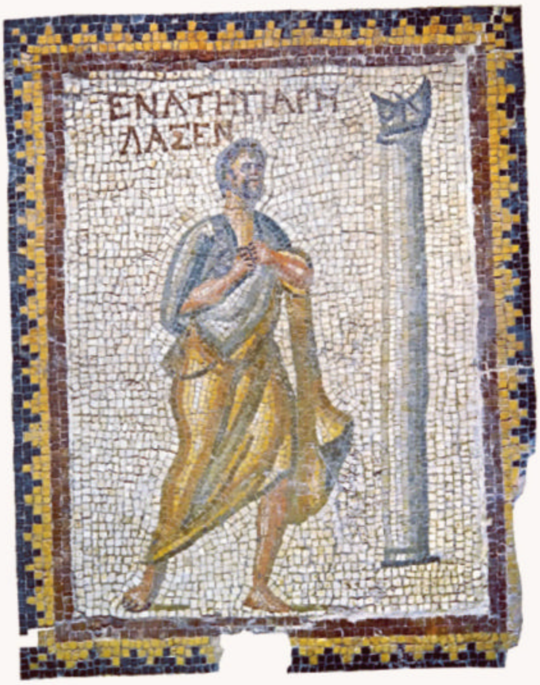
The *passus* was roughly the distance from where a walker's heel left the ground to when that same heel touched the ground again. Yet, while the *passus* was approximate for the average Roman, mile measurements were very exact thanks to the Roman profession of the pacer. This was a man who had trained himself to take steps of an exact length, time after time, and to count as he did so. This led to one of the great triumphs of early science. Thanks to the efforts of a pacer, the scientist Eratosthenes knew the exact distance between a particular point in Syrene in Egypt and another in Alexandria. At the summer solstice the sun shone directly down on Syrene, but cast a small shadow in Alexandria. This allowed Eratosthenes to establish that the distance between Syrene and Alexandria was 1/50th of the polar diameter of the Earth – giving a measurement of 24,662 miles for the circumference of the Earth, and a diameter from pole to pole of 7850 miles. However, Eratosthenes did not allow for the fact that the earth is not completely spherical (it's a bit fatter at the equator), so his measurement was around 250 miles out. He did better on the pole-to-pole diameter though, getting this wrong by just 50 miles. Given that any error in the pacer's original measurement of the distance between Syrene and Alexandria would have been compounded by a factor of 50 when extrapolated for the circumference of the entire planet, we can see that the original pacer was actually extremely accurate.

By the time of the Punic Wars, the Romans had removed the human element by adopting the hodometer – a device invented



A Roman mosaic, dated to the fourth century AD, depicting a man looking at a pillar topped by a sun dial. Thanks to the precision of a pacer, Eratosthenes was able to calculate the diameter and circumference of the Earth using the angle of shadows in Alexandria and Syene in Egypt.

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Part of the relief from Trajan's Column depicting Roman legionaries engaged in construction work. There were special engineering troops within the Roman army, but all troops were involved as labourers.

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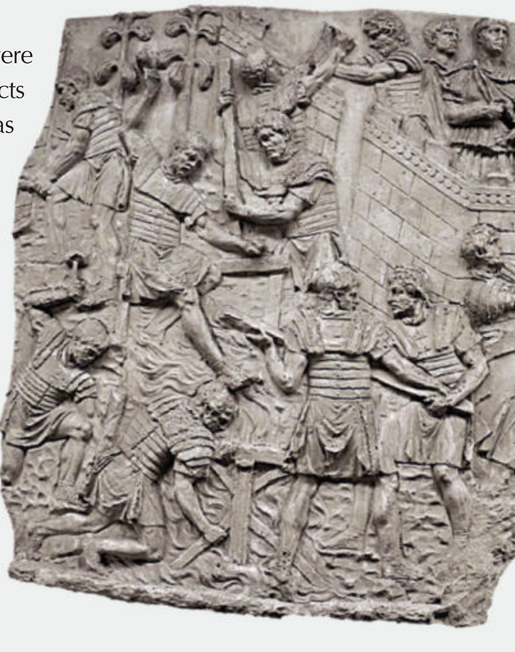
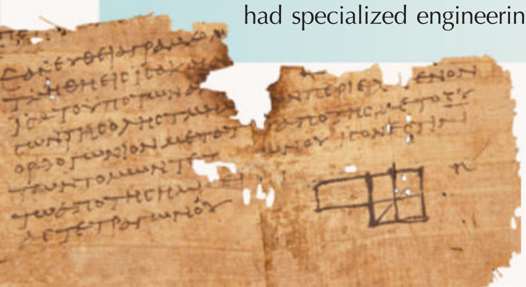


Roman military engineering

The Romans' engineering skills are most well known, arguably, from their military uses. The remains of Roman fortresses and the courses of Roman roads are, perhaps, the most definite and widespread testament of the skills of Roman military engineers. When we look at evidence such as Trajan's Column, however, Rome's legionaries did far more than build roads and forts. From bridges to canals and siege works of all kinds, there was seemingly nothing Roman engineers could not accomplish. One need only look at Hadrian's Wall or the remnants of the siege works at Masada to be amazed or read through the relevant sections of Vitruvius' *De Architectura*. There are many other examples. Although the Roman legions had specialized engineering troops – counted among the *immunes*, who were spared normal fatigue duties – or architects could be seconded to the legions, such as Trajan's architect Apollodorus of Damascus, who designed the bridge at Drobeta-Turnu, Romania, to some extent every Roman legionary was an engineer (or at least an engineering labourer). On Trajan's Column, the legionaries don't even do any fighting, that is left to auxiliaries. Instead, the legions march and they build. Each legionary carried his *dolabra* (a type of mattock), the main tool of Roman military engineering, and more than one commander claimed that it was the weapon with which to defeat the enemy (see *AW* 14-6).



A papyrus fragment from Oxyrhynchus, dated to ca. AD 200-400, containing a Greek mathematical equation and an illustration.

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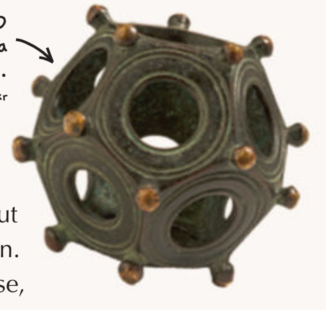

A copper alloy dodecahedron, dated to AD 150–400, that was possibly used as a range finder.

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A Roman milestone dedicated to the emperor Claudius, dated to AD 44, found near Koblenz, Germany. Milestones often recorded how far they were from nearby towns and cities. The distances were recorded either by a pacer or a hodometer.

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by Archimedes. This was a two-wheeled cart containing a toothed gear which ratcheted up with every turn of the exactly-sized wheels. At the distance of a mile the ratchet would engage another, which would push a pellet into a bowl. Thus, the hodometer measured the distance on the ground that the legionaries actually marched. For shorter measurements of still substantial distance – although distance 'as the crow flies', unlike the hodometer – the Romans used a *gnomon*. This involved determining the slight difference in the angle of a sundial shadow at two different points. Experimentation has shown that this can measure a distance of 100 km to within a metre.

The surveyor's workhorse though, was the *groma*. This used four plumb lines to get an exactly horizontal base. From there a surveyor could take a sighting of a post of known height and move that post to an exact distance. Then taking a sighting on the two plumb lines at right angles to this, an exactly rectangular space could be measured for a field or building. While this worked well on gentle slopes, a survey of a steep valley or river crossing was more problematic – and one would really like to be exact when, for example, measuring for a bridge needed to cross an obstacle. Also, of course, the need for a measuring stick made the *groma* useless when, for example, calculating the range for a ballista (mechanized missile thrower) against an advancing enemy force.

This may be where the enigmatic dodecahedron comes in. These twelve-sided objects have holes of different sizes in each of their faces. Several have been discovered by modern archaeologists, but their purpose is unknown. Whatever their purpose, they certainly can work as a range-finder based on the simple proposition that things look smaller the further away they are. The holes are arranged so that at any time one can look at an object through two of the holes in the multi-planed object. The purpose of the first hole is to keep the eye at a precise distance from the second hole on the opposite side of the dodecahedron.

Looking at an object of known height – a Dacian warrior, for example – through that second hole, one can rotate the dodecahedron until that object fills the hole from top to bottom. From there, one can check the size of the hole used and quickly work out the approximate distance to the object. The instrument has convenient knobs for securing string to be placed across the hole giving exactly half the height and, therefore, twice the perceived distance.

Another vital measuring tool was the *chorobates*, which functioned much the same way as a modern spirit level. This was particularly important for designers putting the right camber on roads so that they would drain properly and those wanting water to flow in the right direction in water channels. The *chorobates* was also used to ensure that the flow of water through lead pipes was fast enough to prevent dangerous amounts of lead leaching into drinking water – the Romans were well aware of the dangers of poisoning from lead pipes.

MILLIARIVM
AVREVM

The base of the *Milliarium Aureum* (the Golden Milestone), erected in the Forum Romanum by the emperor Augustus in 20 BC to mark the point where all Roman roads began.

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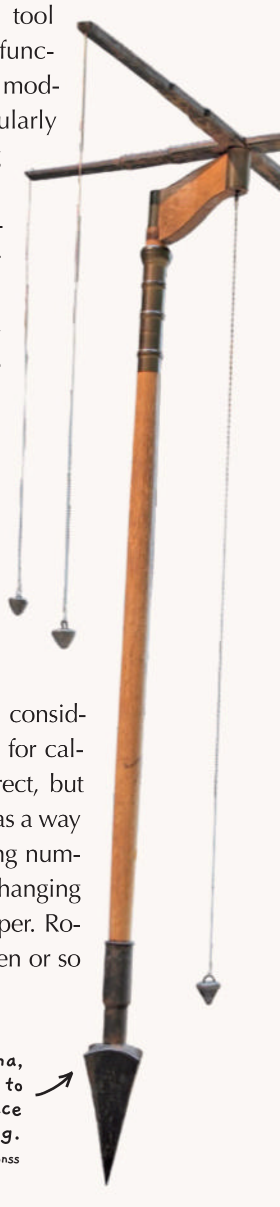

A reconstruction of a *groma*, a piece of equipment used to accurately calculate the space needed for a building.

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Roman mathematics

Roman numerals are generally considered inferior to Arabic numbers for calculations. This is generally correct, but underrates the Roman numeral as a way of tracking dynamically changing numbers. Imagine keeping track of changing numbers without a pen and paper. Roman numerals need only a dozen or so

sticks to record even very high numbers and require only small adjustments to keep track of changes. To change a four to a six, a Roman had merely to move the 'I' from one side of the 'V' to another – and remove it altogether to record five. This also works for 50 ('L'), 100 ('C', originally <), 500 ('D', originally I>), and 1000 ('M'). In short, a Roman engineer working a spreadsheet could do it faster than any European before the last fifty years.

When it came to complex calculations, Romans who needed to divide CMLIII by XXII did exactly what people do today then asked to divide 953 by 22 – they reached for a pocket calculator. The modern calculator is probably on a mobile phone, while the Roman calculator was the abacus.

The abacus was originally a flat stone placed between the column and pediment of a building. But the ancients quickly worked out that lines of pebbles on such a surface could be used to do complex maths very quickly. Later, to prevent the pebbles rolling out of position they were mounted on wires, or, more commonly, slotted into grooves on the surface.

The Roman abacus was a somewhat complex beast, with grooves for tens and multiples of ten, and smaller grooves for recording fractions. As well as engineers working with measurements, these abaci were used by merchants and tax collectors.

Modern academics have established different systems of using the Roman hand abacus – and there is no certainty that individual Romans all used the same system. It took several years to become really skilled with an abacus, but even calculations such as working out the square roots of negative numbers are possible – and at speeds which cannot be achieved with anything apart from modern electronics. Add the versatility of Roman numerals for recording the changing numbers of intermediate steps in a calculation. and the Romans were able to achieve a level of mathematical sophistication unmatched until the early modern era. **AH**

Philip Matyszak is a regular contributor to* Ancient History *magazine.

The Pont du Gard, a Roman aqueduct located just outside Nîmes (ancient Nemausus), France. It dates to the first century AD. Aqueducts were precisely measured to carry water vast distances, ensuring that there was a substantial enough angle, regardless of the terrain, to keep the water flowing.

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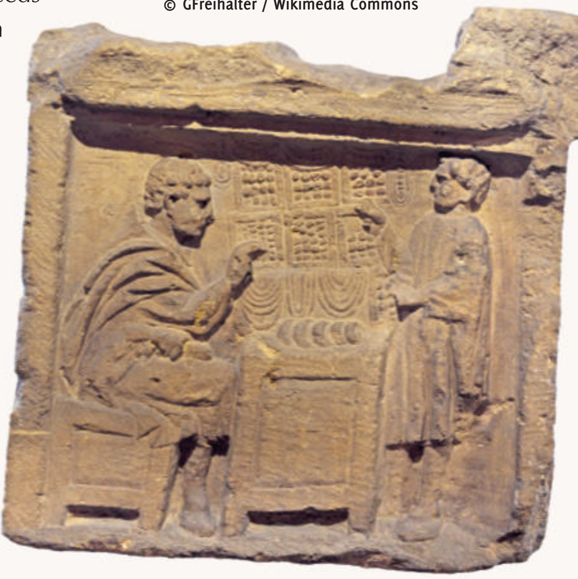

A relief, dated to the second century AD, depicting a tax collector using an abacus. The abacus was an important piece of mathematical equipment for the Romans, allowing them to calculate complex sums in short time.

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A Roman agate cameo, dated to the first century AD, with the Roman numerals XVIII.

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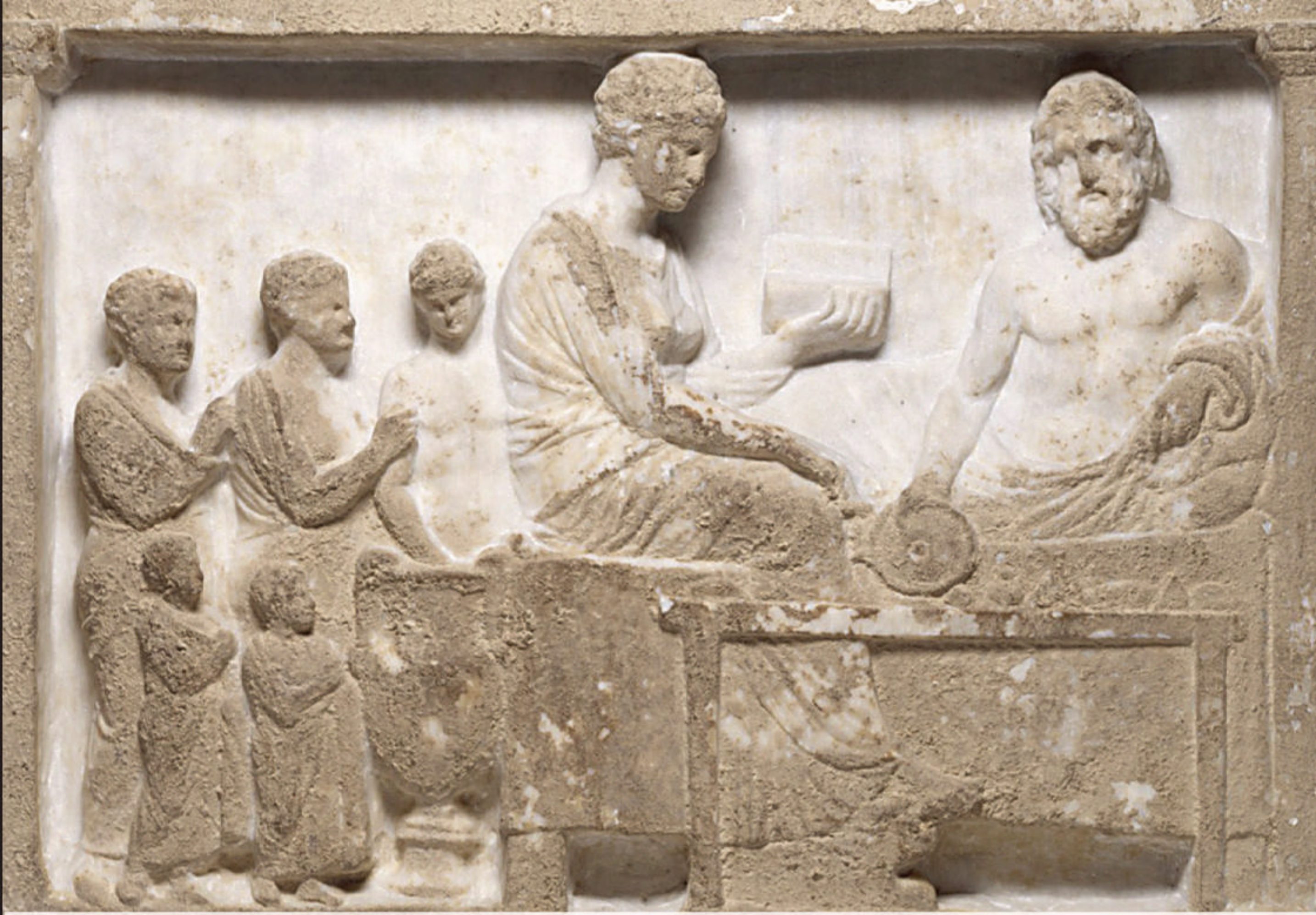

A marble votive relief depicting a funerary banquet scene typical of the second half of the fourth century BC. Grave-side feasts were an important element of Athenian grave rites.

FUNERARY CULT IN ANCIENT ATHENS

VISITING RITES

By Gareth Williams

Attending the graves of the deceased was an important activity in ancient Athens. It was even considered a necessary element of Athenian citizenship. What did attending graves entail? What rites were expected of the attendants?

A *lekythos*, dated to 460-450 BC, depicting a woman tying ribbons to a grave stele. Athenian families were expected to regularly visit, decorate, and maintain the graves of their deceased relatives.

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Before entering political office, an Athenian underwent a public examination, the *dokimasia*, to determine whether he fulfilled the legal requirements of full Athenian citizenship. Among the questions were: “[Do you] have family tombs, and where are they?” (Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution* 55.3). The responsibility of visiting family tombs, along with the performance of customary rites, was of considerable importance to Athenians in Classical times. To guarantee the continuation of such tomb-cult rites, a childless person was willing to adopt an heir to ensure that his remains received appropriate attention from the living.

The necessary rituals were predominantly fulfilled by female relatives. After particular rites were conducted at the graveside on the third, ninth, and thirtieth day after the death, later commemorative visits were paid annually. Visiting the tomb was facilitated by burying them in one precinct, a *peribolos*, often delineated by a low wall. Rarely did burial groupings extend over more than three generations.

The lives of the dead in Hades were somehow impacted by the quality of the attendance lavished on their grave, but only a gift of love could be properly received by the dead. Offerings out of a token observance or guilt were objectionable. Failure to discharge filial obligations brought consequences, even calling into question the rights of inheritance. One claimant was informed by a court prosecutor that he should be “regarded as most impious in claiming to inherit the property of

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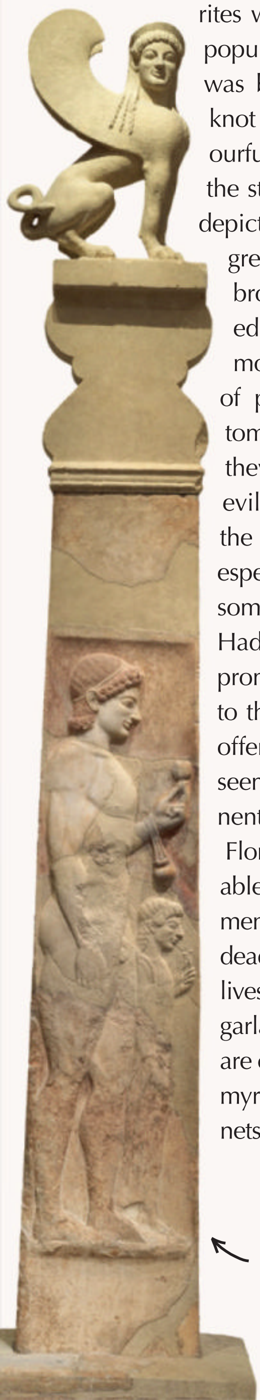
the deceased, [for] he never performed any of the customary rites over him" (Isaeus, 4.19).

Decorating the stele

A popular form of grave marker in Athens was a stele, a stone shaft mounted on a base. Treated with great reverence by mourners, it became the focus of their adoration and devotion. Here they brought gifts of ritual significance to decorate the stele. Offerings were conveyed to the tomb in a shallow, circular basket made of reed or cane with slightly concave sides, called a *kaneon*. Invariably, the basket carrier (*kanephoros*) was a woman.

These gifts included oils and perfumes which were used to anoint either the shaft or steps of the stele, the small vessels in which they were carried were sometimes positioned on the stepped base, perhaps as decoration, or as evidence that attention to familial tomb rites were being maintained. The most popular style of decorating the tomb was by winding, or tying in either a knot or a bow, broad pieces of colourful ribbons around the shaft of the stele. The colours of these ribbons depicted on vase paintings are blue, green, vermillion, black, purple, or brown, and are sometimes illustrated in the outstretched hands of the mourner, perhaps a formal gesture of presentation before dressing the tomb. As for their function, perhaps they possessed the power to ward off evil, or their elaborateness elevated the stele, this evident homage being especially pleasing to the deceased, somehow affecting their position in Hades. These fillets also feature as prominent objects when transported to the tomb by the celebrants. In the offering baskets, the colourful ribbons seem purposefully draped, prominently hanging over the sides.

Floral tributes were certainly acceptable. In Aeschylus' *Persians*, there is mention of "offerings to soothe the dead … the pale green olive, that ever lives its life in luxuriant foliage, and garlanded flowers" (605–20). Tombs are commonly depicted crowned with myrtle branches, the wreaths or coronets placed upright against the steps.



An Attic grave marker, topped by a sphinx, depicting a young man and a small girl, dated to 530 BC.

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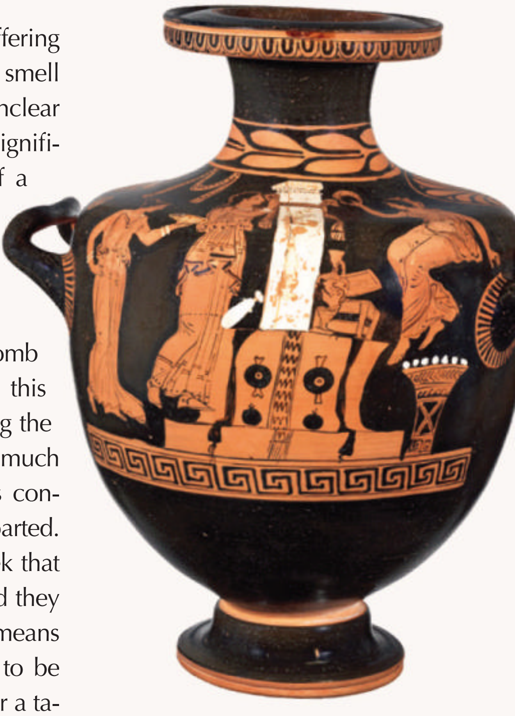
Wild celery was an especially popular offering for the dead – its dark colours and strong smell associated with the underworld. It is unclear whether such foliage had any religious significance. More personal gifts consisted of a lock of shorn hair which was cut in the mourning process.

Feeding the dead

Feasting formed a principal part of the tomb ritual. Whether inhumed or cremated, this communion meal was a way of awarding the deceased their portion, bringing them much delight. Refusing to allot this share was conversely viewed as dishonouring the departed. There are various words in ancient Greek that refer to the food offered to the dead, and they tend to contain the word *enagios*, which means 'under a curse'. The implication seems to be that food reserved for the dead was under a taboo, a pollution, thereby barring its use by the living. Pausanias may allude to this segregation of food for the dead when he describes a Sicyonian festival where Heracles is sacrificed to as both a god and a hero. The sacrifice to him as a god was shared among his worshippers; the part consecrated to him as a hero was exclusively given to him (2.10.1). Whether this applied to the ordinary dead, is uncertain.

Commonly, a sheep or an ox were the designated sacrifice. However, the bones of cows, pigs, goats, and hares are also often found in graves, implying a greater variety of animals were deemed satisfactory. Black, female animals were preferred. The animal was slaughtered over a trench, its head facing downward, causing the blood to trickle down to the earth. It was then skinned, and



An Apulia red-figure *hydria*, dated to 375-350 BC, depicting several women attending a grave site. One is tying a ribbon to the grave monument, while another prepares a libation, and the third places a wreath. Additionally, the scene also depicts a *lekythos*, which contained perfumed oil and were regularly deposited at grave sites.

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The tumulus of the Plataeans who died in the Battle of Marathon. The Athenians dedicated the first fruits of the harvest to them every year.

© annysuomo / Wikimedia Commons

A terracotta model of a pomegranate, a fruit closely associated with death and the Underworld, dated to the fifth – fourth century BC.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

An Attic terracotta *lekythos*, dated to 470-460 BC, depicting a young warrior cutting off his hair with a sword. It is possible that this scene refers to the Seven Against Thebes, when the warriors attached locks of their hair to the chariot of the survivor. Alternatively, it commemorates the death of a young Athenian warrior, as locks of hair were regularly deposited at grave sites, both during the funeral and later visits.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

its carcass burned. Such sacrifices were generally performed around sunset, or at least before nightfall, although exceptions are known. Bones of birds are also prevalent, but these may have been sacrificed to give companionship to the dead rather than to appease their hunger.

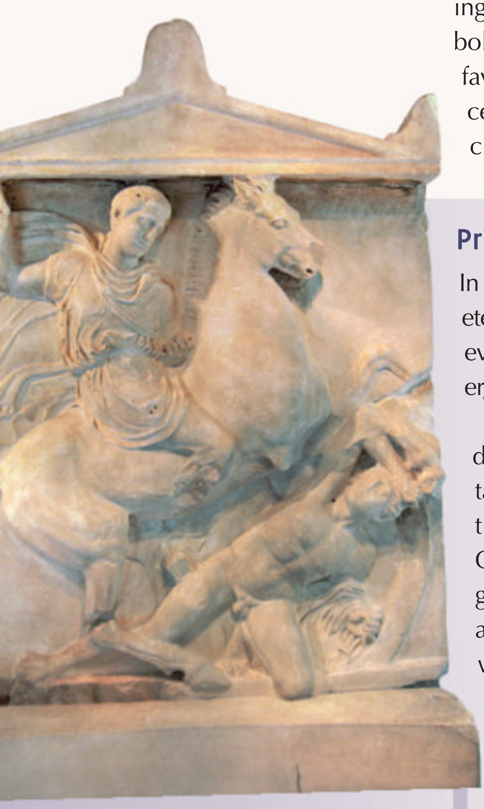
In addition to meat, cakes were also offered to the deceased, which were believed to ward off Cerberus, the three-headed hound guarding Hades. They may be represented on vase paintings as small round objects projecting out of the baskets carried by women mourners. Interestingly, Aristophanes reveals that such honey cakes were also fed to snakes in a cave in Lebadeia, Boeotia, where oracular responses were requested from the hero Trophonius. Snakes were commonly associated with the dead.

Similarly, pomegranates had great significance to the dead. Clay replicas of the fruit have been found in the cemetery at Eleusis dating from the Geometric Period. Persephone, the wife of Hades, became trapped in the Underworld by eating a handful of pomegranate seeds, and she is often depicted holding a pomegranate. Sometimes an egg (symbolic of rebirth) was offered at the tomb, or a favourite meal was prepared for the dead. A certain flautist, remembering a fellow musician's fondness for fish, was in the habit of offering a plate of fry on his grave. The war dead and heroes seem to have had their own particular diets to observe. Thucydides records that the Plataeans who died at Marathon received the first fruits of the Athenian harvest (3.58). For those who died fighting at Plataea, a black bull was to be annually sacrificed (Plutarch, *Aristides* 21.3).

Drink offerings and prayers

One literary example of a tomb visit describes Electra commencing the ceremony by praying to Hermes (the leader of dead souls) to request assistance in summoning Gaia (the earth, and mother of all life) and other underworld deities overseeing her father's house. She desires their mediation between her and the dead. A lustral libation, normally water, was also poured upon the hands, to clean them ahead of offering the sacrifices. Before pouring out the drink offering, Electra commends both herself and her gift to the deceased, issuing an invitation for the dead to attend the rite being enacted in their honour.

During the Classical period, the act of libation seems to have been a primary mode of sacrifice, providing perhaps the most effective means of summoning the ghost of the deceased. Iphigenia calls upon her supposedly dead brother, Orestes, saying: "I shall pour upon the earth's expanse … the wine



The funerary stele of Dexileus, a cavalryman from Thoricus who died during the Corinthian War.

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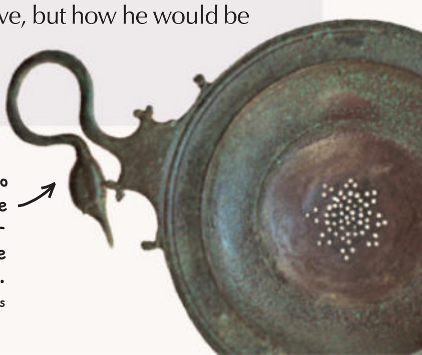
Private grave, public monument

In the modern world, despite the size of cemeteries, attending to a grave is a very personal, even private, affair. In ancient Athens, however, graves were very much public monuments.

The grave of Dexileus, a cavalryman who died in the Corinthian War, was almost certainly erected by his family with the intention that it was seen. Rising high above the Ceramicus along the Sacred Way, Dexileus' grave monument would have stood out. It appears that the epitaph on the monument was also meant to be read by passersby:

> *Dexileos, son of Lysanios, from Thorikos, was born in the archonship of Teisandros, died in the archonship of Euboulides at Corinth, one of the five horsemen.*

That the epitaph makes a note of Dexileus' age when he died – around nineteen or twenty – is unusual. It was likely erected to show how, being so young, Dexileus could not have participated in the regime of the Thirty Tyrants at the end of the Peloponnesian War (he would have been ten at the time), who ruled Athens with an iron grip, confiscating property and putting citizens to death, which the Athenian cavalry had certainly participated in. Additionally, the emphasis on his death in battle during the Corinthian War, coupled with the design of the monument itself – a victorious cavalryman trampling an enemy – was likely an attempt to distance him from the accusations of cowardice that were levelled at members of the cavalry in the early fourth century BC. Clearly, Dexileus' family were concerned not only with keeping his memory alive, but how he would be remembered by other Athenians.



A bronze perforated bowl, dated to the fifth century BC, which may have been used to pour libations, an important element of grave rites, to the dead and underworld deities.

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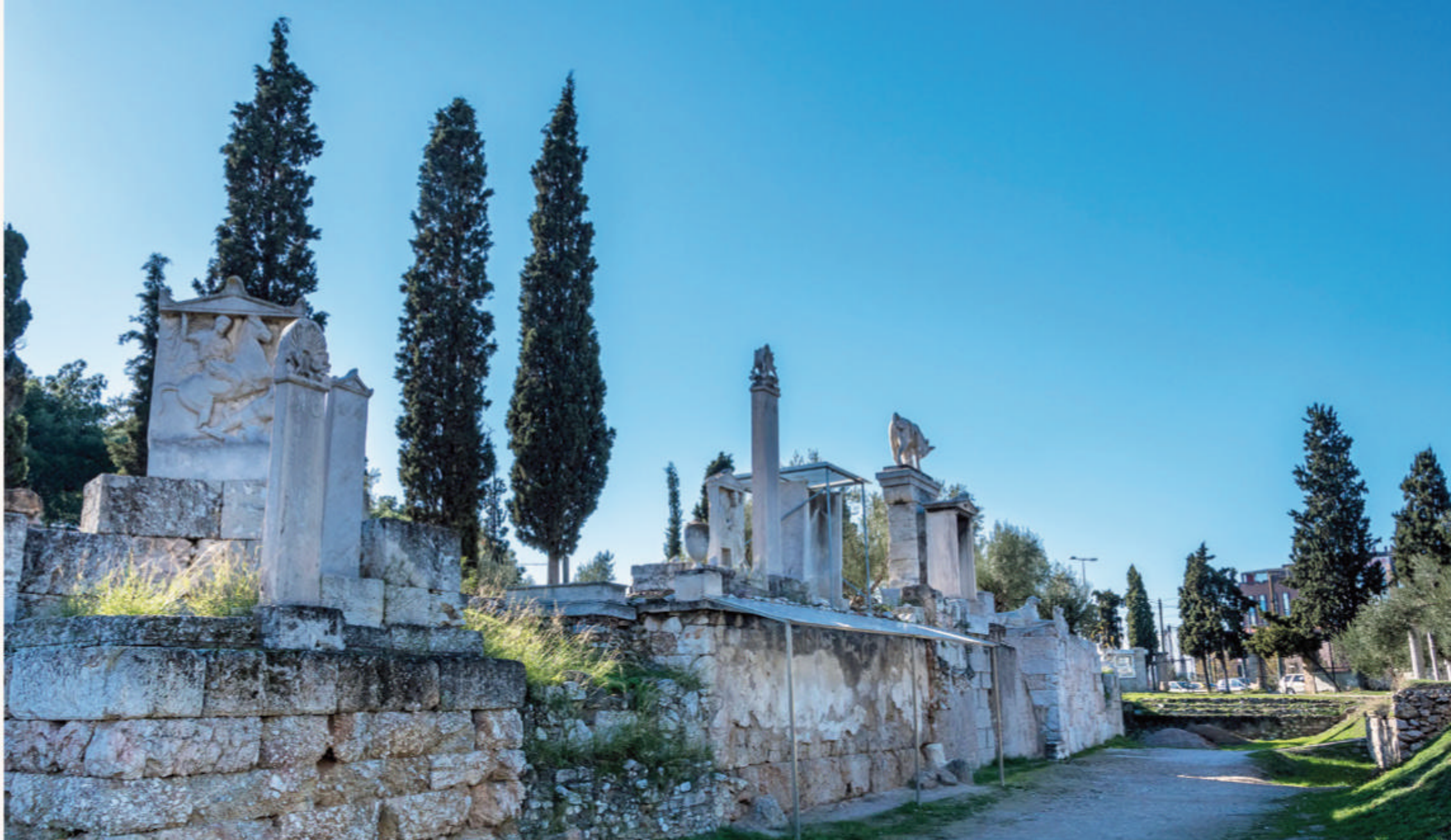
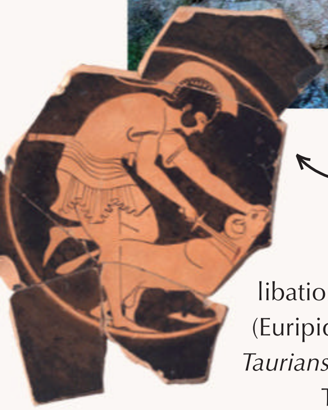




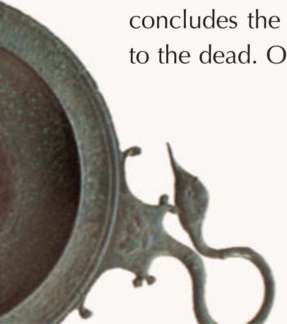
A fragment of an Attic red-figure *kylix*, dated to 490–480 BC, depicting a warrior sacrificing a ram.

© The Cleveland Museum of Art

libation … to soothe the dead" (Euripides, *Iphigenia Among the Taurians* 160–69).

The drink offering was always poured out before the throat of a blood sacrifice was cut, being poured either over the steps supporting the stele or even over the shaft of the stele itself. Sometimes, it was poured into a trench dug before the tomb, possibly as an invocation to the dead. Besides wine, there was *pelanos*, a kind of porridge, its use wholly confined to the ghosts and spirits of the underworld. Electra states that she would "pour this thick flowing offering [*pelanos*] at my father's tomb" (Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers* 91–92). The liquid, or perhaps paste, could be in mixed or unmixed form, but the ingredients were always the same – honey, milk, water, wine, and oil.

While pouring out the drink offering, Electra again prayed to the gods for vengeance on behalf of her murdered father. Blessings were also requested at this time. She concludes the ceremony by singing a paean to the dead. Other family members probably also furnished a descant to the singing of dirges in honour of the dead. At the end, the vessels which brought the offerings of perfume and oil were normally, but not exceptionally, smashed in the vicinity of the tomb.



Quid pro quo

A genuine desire to honour dead loved ones can never be denied. However, the selfishly tinged symbiotic relationship of such tomb rites cannot be ignored either. By honouring the dead, the living hoped to accrue good from their filial devotion. A lack of ritual activity dishonoured the dead, bringing curses down upon the living. Those about to die were conscious of their need to rest in peace through the activities of their family around the tomb. If such duties were neglected, then their residence in Hades was viewed as more difficult to endure; their families were encouraged to fulfil such obligations. Consequently, the fulfilling of tomb rites was viewed as being in the best interests of both parties. **MW**

Gareth Williams has a BA (Hons.) in Art and Art History and has written articles on Greek, Roman, and medieval history.

A view of the Street of Tombs in the Kerameikos, where elaborate grave monuments were erected to honour the dead and to draw the attention of the living.

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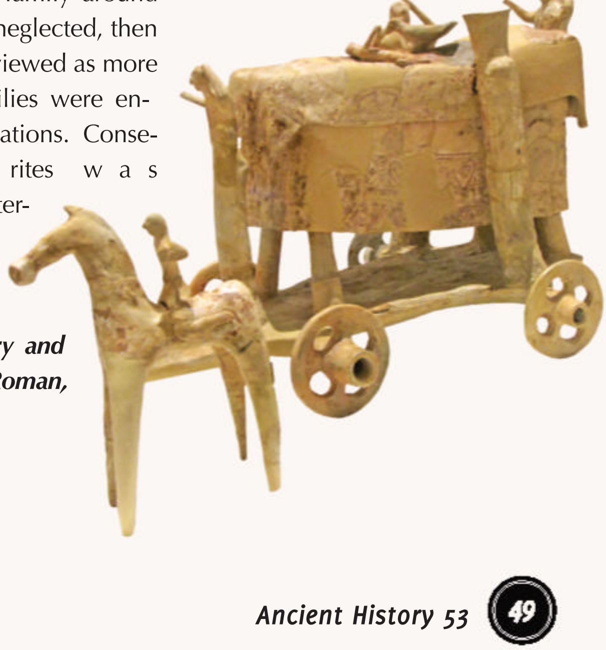
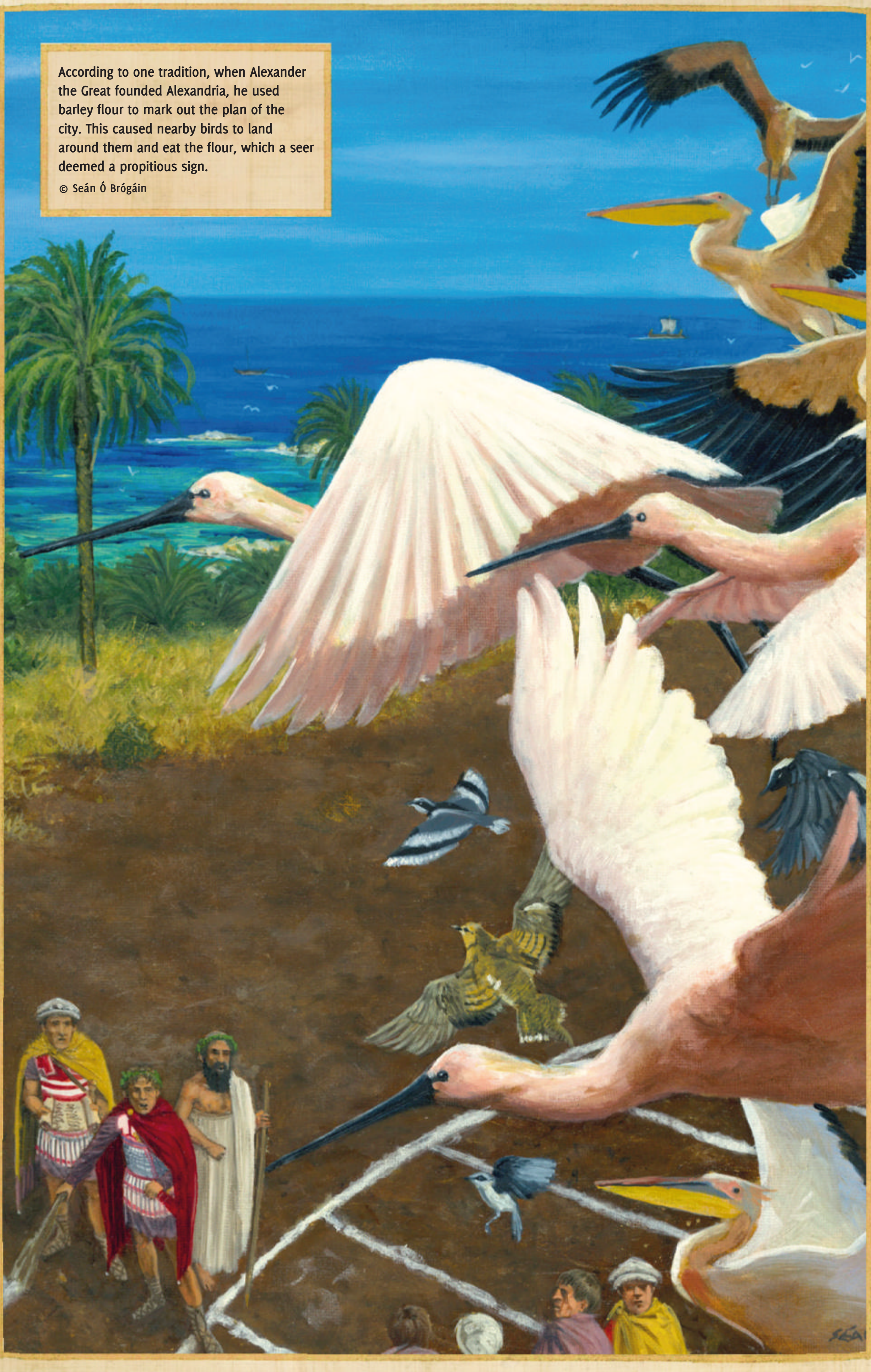


A terracotta model of a horse-drawn bier, dated to the seventh century BC, with four female mourners and a child accompanying it. In the Archaic period, funerals were extravagant affairs, with long processions and rich feasts. By the Classical period, however, sumptuary laws restricted such displays, making funerals more personal affairs.

© Lauren van Zoonen



According to one tradition, when Alexander the Great founded Alexandria, he used barley flour to mark out the plan of the city. This caused nearby birds to land around them and eat the flour, which a seer deemed a propitious sign.

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SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION

THE FOUNDING OF ALEXANDRIA

By Tim Howe

Alexander the Great is credited with the foundation of many cities in antiquity, most famously Alexandria in Egypt. However, Alexander was the 'founder' of Alexandria in much the same way as Romulus was the 'founder' of Rome – they both are credited by later literary sources with planning a city destined to be great, laying out its walls personally and in the process having encounters with prophetic birds. Yet historians have been much less willing to accept that Alexandria's foundation story is as much a mix of fact and legend, propaganda and truth as what we have been told about the earliest moments of Rome.

Contemporary Egyptian-language sources and archaeological evidence clearly demonstrate that Alexander did not plan and build a city on the site of Egyptian Alexandria. His successor Ptolemy I Soter did. The Greco-Roman literary sources preserve the ways in which Ptolemy and his dynasty rewrote history of Alexandria so that posterity would fix its gaze solely on Alexander the Great, primarily to create a pedigree for Alexandria to justify its right to be the capital of the Ptolemaic Empire. The Ptolemies did this because, by the Hellenistic period, anything 'new' had the potential to be viewed with a certain amount of suspicion. The logic of this runs as follows: if the ancestors had not done a thing, it must not have been worth doing. This backward-gazing dynamic operated to the utmost degree among the people of that most ancient of ancient Mediterranean places – Egypt. To justify such a paradigm-shifting event as creating a new capital for Egypt to replace Memphis, the ancestral capital of the Old Kingdom pharaohs who built the great pyramids, the Ptolemies had to link it to the most important paradigm-shifter of their day – Alexander the Great. Ptolemy I started this process in a very original way, by personally writing a history of Alexander's campaigns. In the pages of his *History*, Ptolemy I justified his own succession and explained the ways in which his Egyptian capital was envisioned and sanctioned by Alexander himself. In a very clever way, Ptolemy used his history to 'fill in the gaps' not covered by the official account of written by Alexander's court historian Callisthenes. Following his model, Ptolemy's heirs sponsored others to expand Alexander's (and Alexandria's) story even further, as local politics demanded.

But these politicized accounts – what we really should call propaganda – contradicted historical fact: contemporary documents and archaeological evidence show us that Alexander had minimal connections with the great city at the mouth of Nile. During Alexander's reign, there was no city called Alexandria on the coast of the Nile Delta. The Aristotelian *Oeconomica*, written in the decade or so after Alexander's death, describes conditions on the ground:

> *"King Alexander commanded Cleomenes of Naucratis to establish a settlement near Pharos Island and to establish there a marketplace which had formerly been held at Canopus"* (*Oecomonica* 1352a29–30; compare Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.5.4, 7.23.7).

Cleomenes, the Governor of Egypt before Ptolemy, prepared the port at the Canopic mouth so that grain could travel down the Canopic Branch and be exported to Greece, which was experiencing severe famine. Here, Pharos Island plays an important role, for all of the sources mention it as central to Alexander's plans. As an offshore island, Pharos would provide a safe haven for both an occasional *emporion* ('marketplace'), such as that set up by Cleomenes, and a military garrison to guard the grain supply as it was gathered for sale and transport. A garrison on the Canopic branch of the Nile in the Western Delta would also balance the garrison at Pelusium to the east. With garrisons flanking either side of the Delta, access to the rich agricultural resources of Egypt was blocked. Additionally, the garrison on Pharos Island could serve as a staging post for future conquests to the west; if we take the Greco-Roman literary sources at their word that Alexander was planning an expedition to Carthage just before unexpected death in 323 BC (Diodorus, 18.4; Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.1.2).

The Egyptian-language sources are even more precise about Alexandria's status, or lack thereof. According to the so-called Stele of the Satrap, written on 9 November of 311 BC by the priests from the Nile Delta town of Buto, the city we later know as Alexandria did not yet bear that name, nor was it considered a 'city' at all. Instead, the place was called a fortress, its formal name was 'The fortress of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Beloved of the ka-spirit of Amon, Chosen of Re, the Son of Re, Alexander'. The stele also reports that it was Ptolemy I who had built the palace and moved Greek soldiers there in preparation for his campaign against Demetrius, the son of Antigonus, in 312 BC, despite Alexander's command to Cleomenes, as reported by the *Oeconomica*. Significantly, the Stele of the Satrap also states that Ptolemy's palace – or 'house', as the texts calls it – at Alexander's fortress was currently under construction and not yet complete. This word 'house' is rather significant. In Egyptian texts, the king's 'house' serves as a metaphor for his capital or seat of power. In fact, the word 'pharaoh' derives from the Egyptian word 'great house' and came to be a shorthand way to refer to the king of Egypt.

Therefore, even by 311 BC, twelve years after Alexander's death when the Stele of the Satrap was inscribed, Alexandria was not yet called a city (*nwt*) in Egyptian texts like Memphis, the Ptolemaic capital and resting place of Alexander's body (Pausanias, 1.6.3). Moreover, in 311 BC, we can see that Ptolemy I had only just begun the process of turning the 'Fortress of Alexander' into the new capital of Egypt. This process of shifting the capital from Memphis to Alexandria was not fully completed until after Ptolemy I's death when his son Ptolemy II Philadelphus completed the grand Soma ('body') shrine and moved Alexander's mummified corpse there (Pausanias, 1.7.1).

By crediting Alexander, Ptolemy and his heirs were able to have something their competitors did not – a capital planned and blessed by Alexander himself. This status as the 'special' Successor can be seen in one of Ptolemy I's Egyptian titles: 'The great leader who is himself great among the [other] great leaders' (*wr*^{c}*3 m-hr-ib wrw*). As generations of Ptolemies were interred next to Alexander at the Soma in Alexandria, Alexander evolved into the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty as well as the founder of the capital city of Egypt. By this process, the Ptolemies became enmeshed with Alexander and their role in creating Alexandria had been nearly effaced by time.

Yet we can still detect the layers of Alexandria's story in the surviving Greco-Roman literary sources. Plutarch (*Alexander* 26.2–6), writing in the late first to early second century AD, offers the most complete version:

> *"After his conquest of Egypt, Alexander wished to settle a large and populous Greek city and name it after himself. And so, on the advice of his architects he measured off and laid out the site for it. Then, in the night, as he slept, he saw a wonderful vision. A man with grey hair and of a venerable bearing appeared to stand by him and recite these verses: 'There is an island in the wave-filled sea, Pharos they call it, on the Egyptian shore' (Odyssey 4.354–5) ... [After inspecting the island] Alexander ordered the plan of the city to be drawn to include this site. There was no chalk at hand, so they took barley flour and used it to mark out a semicircular area on the dark soil in, drawing straight lines of equal length on the inner part of the semi-circle, so that it took the shape of a chlamys, or military cloak. As the king was delighting in the design, suddenly a flock of birds from the river and the lagoon – infinite in number and of every sort and size – landed on the place like clouds and devoured every particle of the barley flour, with the result that even Alexander was greatly disturbed at the omen. However, the seers urged him not to worry because this was a sign that the city he would build here would have most abundant resources and be a nursing mother for men of every nation. And so, he ordered those in charge of the work to get on with it, while he himself set out for the temple of Ammon."*

Despite the focus on Alexander, it is significant that Plutarch carefully distinguishes Alexander's role as 'founder' of Alexandria, rather than 'builder', for he observes that the seers had predicted Alexandria's greatness will be in the future. By Plutarch's time, there was still some kernel of understanding that Alexander did not himself build the great capital city of Ptolemaic Egypt, but merely envisioned and began the process of creation. Diodorus Siculus, writing a century or so earlier than Plutarch, in the time of Mark Antony and the last of the Ptolemaic monarchs, Cleopatra VII, even more explicitly acknowledges that later kings were responsible for bringing about Alexandria's current greatness, noting how "Alexander ordered the construction of a palace ... But the palace is not just Alexander's work, because almost all the later rulers of Egypt, right up to the present day, have spent large sums on construction" (17.52.4 –5). Diodorus also tells us how, after deciding that a city should be placed

The Stele of the Satrap

Dated to 311 BC, and likely erected in the town of Buto in the Nile Delta, the Stele of the Satrap is an important document for understanding Ptolemy's tenure as satrap of Egypt prior to his assumption of the kingship. Notably, Alexander IV is used for the dating formula at the beginning of the inscription, but the text is about Ptolemy first and foremost. He is referred to as a "great prince of Egypt", for example, and the identity of the king making offerings to Horus Edjo in the accompanying relief is ambiguous, the cartouche left empty.

The bulk of the inscription is concerned with Ptolemy's actions as satrap of Egypt. Significantly, the stele records how Ptolemy restored several cultic symbols, from sacred statues to scrolls, to Egyptian temples. Additionally, it records how Ptolemy restored a portion of land that had been donated to the gods Pe and Dep by Pharaoh Khababash, but which had been revoked by one Hšryš (Xerxes). Thus, the Stele of the Satraps is, effectively, a form of propaganda designed to endear Ptolemy to his Egyptian subjects through religious favours prior to him becoming king of Egypt.

in the Western Nile Delta, Alexander left the details of its construction to his Companions (17.52.7).

Layers of Ptolemaic propaganda

We can trace the ways in which the Ptolemies created and then, from time to time, updated the 'Myth of the Founder' through three main authors: Ptolemy I Soter himself, writing between 310 BC and his death in 283 BC; Cleitarchus, an Alexandrian academic who worked in the Library of Alexandria under Ptolemaic patronage, most likely in the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who ruled from 283–246 BC; and Heracleides Lembus, an Egyptian civil servant who likely wrote his *History* ca. 163–145 BC, during the restoration of Ptolemy VI Philometor.

With Ptolemy I's history, we see the initial narrative take shape: Alexander planned out a city with the intent that it would be a great capital and left the construction and logistics to others. According to Ptolemy, as reported by the second-century-AD Roman historian Arrian, Alexander thought his city was bound to be prosperous (*Anabasis* 3.1.5). So consequential did Alexander consider this city that he named Alexandria after himself that he took the time to mark out the ground plan, planning out space for the various the religious centres, going so far as to lay out where temples were to be built and which gods, both Greek and Egyptian, they would honour. But this narrative goes against what contemporary sources tell us. Alexander's satrap of Egypt, Cleomenes was known for being hostile to native Egyptian cults (Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.23.6), and the Aristotelian *Oeconomica* tells us that his charge from Alexander was limited to establishing a coastal *emporion* near the mouth of the Canopic branch of the Nile. By contrast, Ptolemy I so prioritized building and repairing Egyptian temples and shrines that the Stele of the Satrap and other Egyptian texts single him out among recent non-Egyptian rulers for his care of Egyptian culture. In addition, a hieroglyphic inscription found at Carthage, dedicated by one of Ptolemy I's ambassadors to that city, praises Ptolemy for marking out space in the small central Delta town of Bahu, modern-day Baqlia, for the various local Egyptian cults. In this description, we can see a template for Ptolemy's account of Alexander's actions at Alexandria in his *History*. In the end, caring for Egyptian gods made sense for Ptolemy, the ruler of Egypt, in ways that it did not for Alexander, the busy conqueror of the Persian Empire.

Ptolemy II Philadelphus and his sister-wife Arsinoe II deepened their father's engagement with the Egyptian gods, as we can see in their temple constructions, such as the great complex of Isis at Philae. It was Ptolemy II who created the Great Quadrennial Festival, held on the fourth anniversary of Ptolemy I's death, where the gods of the realm, both Egyptian and Greek, were displayed and the foundation stories of the Ptolemaic dynasty and their capital city of Alexandria were performed and celebrated. Under Ptolemy II, we also see the commissioning of a new history of Alexander's campaigns, written by the Alexandrian academic Cleitarchus, working in the newly constructed Library of Alexandria. In this version, Cleitarchus has Alexander found Alexandria as a direct result of his consultation with the Oracle of Ammon at Siwah, and unequivocally names Ammon as Alexander's divine father (Curtius, 4.7.5–8.2; Justin, 11.11.2–13). Thus, by shifting the chronology of events to have the founding of Alexandria come after the consultation of the oracle and adding in new details, Cleitarchus signals to a new audience of Alexandrians that divine approval has been conferred upon their city.

Heraclides Lembus, an Alexandrian native, historian and important diplomat working for Ptolemy VI Philometor, gives us another layer of the story – the introduction of Homer as Alexander's guiding force. By Heraclides' time in the second century BC, there had been many revolts against Ptolemaic rule by the native Egyptians. In order to rally the Greek population of Egypt against the indigenous rebels, and also recruit Greek soldiers from outside the kingdom, Ptolemy VI used the Greek cultural icon, Homer. In a now familiar pattern, Alexandria became the canvas for a new wave of propaganda. Like Ptolemy II, Ptolemy VI sponsored new cult activities that recast Alexandria's foundation mythologies. He also constructed a temple compound to Homer within the oldest parts of the city. The use of Homer as guide and inspiration for Alexander when he founded the city not only served to separate Alexandria from all other great cities in the region (i.e. the rival Seleucid capital of Antioch), but also distanced Alexander from the Egyptian deities like Ammon, who was now rather problematic given the native Egyptian revolts. The goals of stressing Egyptian traditions that had been relevant for Ptolemies I and II were no longer so central to Ptolemy VI.

And so, with Ptolemy VI and the end of the 200s BC, we have in place all of the elements that Plutarch reports. This is how most history books report the story of Alexandria's origins today. Unfortunately, the truth is much less poetic. Alexander did not plan and build Alexandria, Ptolemy I Soter did. Yet for socio-political reasons, Ptolemy and his heirs could not claim Alexandria as their own, instead attributing it to Alexander. As a consequence of naming the capital Alexandria in homage to Alexander the Great, the Ptolemies became victims of their own propaganda. They were not remembered as the builders of one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. Such is the power of propaganda – over time, and with the help of historians, it can easy easily replace the truth with an 'obvious fact'. **AH**

Dr. Tim Howe is Professor of History and Ancient Studies at St. Olaf College, Minnesota (US)

A view of the peristyle in the House of the Vettii in Pompeii. The large house was possibly owned by two freedmen, the Vettii brothers. Once they had been manumitted, freedmen could obtain significant wealth.

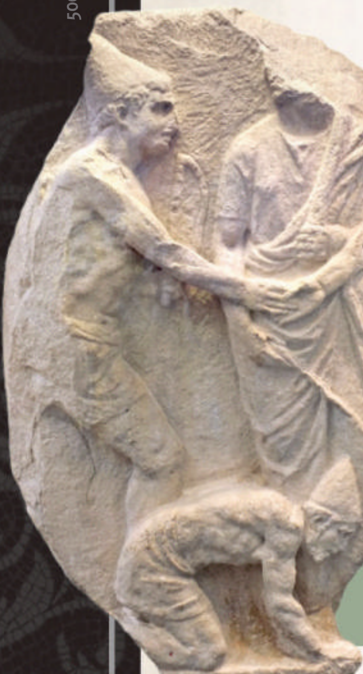
MANUMISSION IN ANCIENT ROME

HOW TO FREE YOUR SLAVE

By Philip Matyszak

Slavery was an integral part of Roman society, from the average household to the imperial palace. Yet slavery was not a permanent position, and slaves could be freed. How often did the Romans free slaves, how was it done and why? And what happened to the freed slaves afterwards?

Not all slaves were the same. A highly educated slave who was an integral part of a Roman household had a very good chance of becoming free. Tiro, for example, was a member of Cicero's household, effectively Cicero's secretary, who happened to be a slave. Nevertheless, even while he was what Roman law regarded as a 'talking tool', Cicero spoke of Tiro with great affection (see Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 16.16). His servant was a friend before he was a freedman. Individuals such as Tiro may have spent on average less than a decade in servitude before being manumitted. On the other end of the scale, agricultural slaves had little chance of freedom.

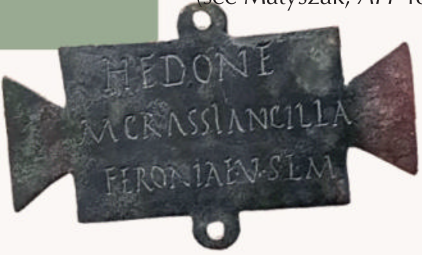


A first century BC relief depicting two slaves, both wearing the 'cap of freedom'. The standing slaves is grasping the hand of, presumably, his previous master, while a magistrate stands behind them.

© Ad Meskens / Wikimedia Commons

Laws and limits

Roman law recognized several different types of manumission, and the laws affecting manumission changed over the course of time. For example, Roman law ruled that only half of a decedent's slaves could be freed in his will – a figure that was later reduced to a third and then a quarter. Another kind of testamentary manumission was when a specific slave was freed for the purpose of becoming his former master's heir. This heir could not refuse his inheritance, which left the newly-freed slave with the task of negotiating with the creditors as to how he could repay the debts of the deceased. Other slaves might be freed on condition that they erect a suitable memorial to their former master. These often registered that they had done so by putting their names after the standard inscription HFC (meaning 'the heirs made this') but also appending 'L' for *libertini*, indicating their newly-freed status (see Matyszak, *AH* 48).



A bronze plaque, dated to the second century AD, inscribed with a dedication to the goddess Feronia, who was popular with slaves and freedmen.

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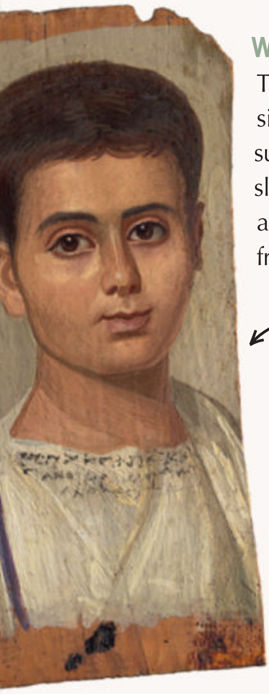
DID YOU KNOW?

The reason many Romans of the imperial era were called 'Julius' was not because they were relatives of that line – which was actually defunct – but because imperial freedmen adopted the name when they were made citizens.

Another type of manumission was the Lustral. Most owners gave their slaves a *peculium* (an allowance) to take care of incidental expenses, such as a new tunic. Some slaves managed to scrimp enough savings from their *peculia* to eventually buy themselves from their owners.

Where, when, why?

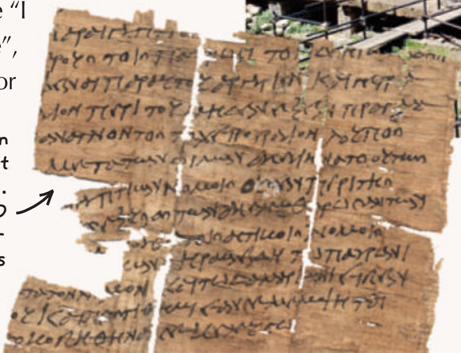
The usual time for such manumissions was during the Roman census, when citizens were counted. A slave could step up to the censors and announce that he was now free. If the former slave's master was there to confirm this, the ex-slave was registered as a Roman citizen on the spot. However, there were caveats to this citizenship. Freedmen could not be elected to public office, become priests, or aspire to Senatorial rank. Some freedmen, known as *dediticii* or *dediticii Aeliani*, if they had been subject to harsh punishments, were not granted the rights of citizenship.



A mummy portrait of a boy named Eutyches, dated to ca. AD 100–150, who was a freedman. The inscription may refer to his manumission.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The oldest, most common, and simplest form of manumission was the Justa et Legitima Manumissio Vindicta, which took about as long to perform as to pronounce. The mini-ceremony had to be performed in front of a Roman magistrate and often happened while that magistrate was travelling somewhere else. Sometimes, if an owner living outside Rome wanted to manumit a batch of slaves, he would arrange to meet a magistrate on the road as he went about his duties. Or the magistrate might be going to the baths or a dinner. The master would step up and declare "I wish this person to be free", and give the reason for manumission (usually in recognition of loyal service or the slave buying their freedom). The magistrate would lay a wooden rod called a *festucca* upon the shoulder of the slave who was also held tight by their owner. The magistrate intoned "By the law of the Romans, you are free by vindication". The former owner turned his slave around, released his grip and the deed was done.



A papyrus fragment from Oxyrhynchus with a report on a case tried before M. Rutilius Lupus, prefect in AD 114–117, involving a freedman named Damarion, and his patron Heraclides.

© University of Pennsylvania Museum

Naturally, the new *libertus* had to hurry away to complete a considerable amount of paperwork, but he would do so as a free man. For example, he had now to register himself with his *mancipator*'s name as part of his household.

A freedman was not free of his former master who now became his patron. A Roman 'family' did not just consist of blood relatives, but also others who fell under the control of the *paterfamilias* – as the manumitted slave now did. However, while a freed slave still owed considerable obligations to the former master, for the child of a freed slave, the sky was the limit. For example, the poet Horace, son of a freedman, was a drinking buddy of the emperor Augustus. **AH**

Philip Matyszak is a regular contributor to* Ancient History *magazine.

RELIVS·L·L
ERMIA
IVS·DE·COLLE
VIMINALE
PRAECESSIT CORPORE
CASTO
ANIMO

A funerary relief, dated to ca. 80 BC, depicting Aurelius Hermia and Aurelia Philematum, husband and wife. Both freed slaves, they have been depicted as Roman citizens, as freedmen were granted citizenship upon their manumission – with some caveats.

© Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons

The remains of Temple C from the Lago di Torre Argentina area in Rome, dated to the fourth – third century BC. The temple is believed to have been dedicated to Feronia, an Italic goddess of fertility, health, and abundance, as well as civil liberties.

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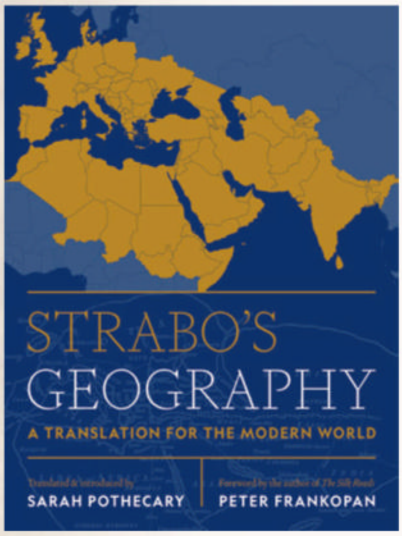
STRABO'S GEOGRAPHY
A TRANSLATION FOR THE MODERN WORLD
Translated & introduced by
SARAH POTHECARY
Foreword by the author of The Silk Roads
PETER FRANKOPAN

Strabo's Geography
A Translation for the Modern World

Translated by Sarah Pothecary
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Geography is a description of the globe as it appeared to Strabo, an observer living in the tumultuous days of the Late Republic and Early Roman Empire. Born in the province of Asia, and living in Rome and Alexandria, Strabo travelled between each for his research, collecting information about places and people, while supplementing his firsthand experiences with extensive reading. The result is an encyclopaedic work that, along with descriptions of continents and seas, rivers and mountains, cities and sanctuaries, includes history and mythology – facts and 'alternative facts'. As Peter Frankopan notes in his 'Foreword', Strabo writes about matters ranging from "taming an elephant to practicing yoga, or from visiting an exhibition of sacred crocodiles from the Nile in Rome to watching glass-blowers at work in Alexandria" (p. xi). These are all set in the context of shifting political power in the first century BC/AD.

At over 300,000 words, Strabo's *Geography* is one of the longest and most complete ancient texts in ancient Greek in existence. Modern researchers needing an English translation have long had to rely on by H. L. Jones' Loeb Classical Library edition, published by Harvard University Press in 1917 through 1932. Sarah Pothecary's new translation is lively, almost journalistic and conversational in tone, making the text appealing to a new generation of readers. Comparing the opening line of the book in which Strabo presents geography as philosophy reveals the different treatments. Jones' version reads: "The science of Geography, which I now propose to investigate, is, I think, quite as much as any other science, a concern of the philosopher; and the correctness of my view is clear for many reasons" (1.1.1). The structure is complex, the phrasing is dated. Pothecary's version reads: "I believe that if anything is part of the philosopher's mandate it is the science of geography, to which I have decided to turn my attention. That my belief is not without merit is clear on many counts" (1 C, 1; p. 9). This is Strabo as Lonely Planet Guide.

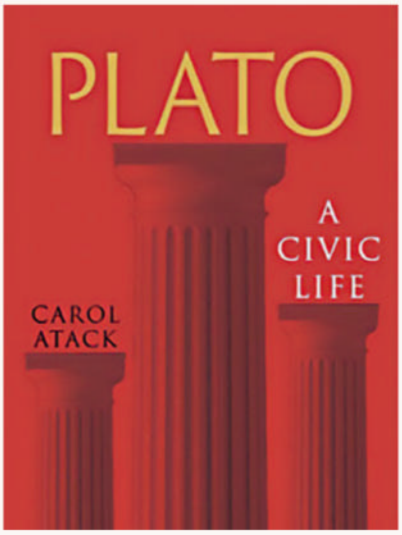
This style works especially well when the reportage is about recent events: "At the current time, as I said, all fighting has stopped. Augustus Caesar eliminated the Cantabrians … Tiberius, who has succeeded him, has set over the region an army three legions strong and has made some of the people not only peaceable but civilized at last" (156 C, 5-13; p. 192). The reference infers he wrote this passage after Tiberius' accession in AD 14. His observations can inform and amuse. He reports that, going into battle, the Cimbrians (ancient inhabitants of Denmark) "would drum on the hides [from a sacrificed beast] stretched over the wicker of their wagon, making a hell of a racket" (294 C, 4-14, p. 351). Yet when he writes "The oceanic region beyond the Elbe is totally unknown to us" (294 C, 15-34; p. 351), he reminds us of how much was still *terra incognita* to the Romans.

Pothecary provides a scholarly and insightful 'Translator's Introduction' at the start of each chapter and part, alerting the modern reader to the issues and pitfalls of Strabo's *Geography*. "Imagine learning about the geography of Britain by reading Shakespeare's plays," she writes, explaining, "Essentially, that is how Strabo approaches the geography of Greece, except that the literary figure in question is Homer" (p. 393). She notes that Greece takes up three of the seventeen books into which Strabo's narrative divides, making it "wildly disproportionate to the amount of physical space occupied by Greece", suggesting it is "consistent with its cultural weight and a reminder that cultural considerations are far more important for Strabo than political boundaries" (p. 395). The new translation is also meticulously annotated. Additionally, there are explanatory notes and footnotes. Readers expecting maps showing places mentioned in the text may be disappointed by the selection provided. The maps in this volume serve a different function: they are route maps tracing Strabo's real or imagined journey through the places he discusses, which is helpful in getting one's bearings for the direction of travel.

After reviewing the three continents, *Geography* begins with the Iberian Peninsula, meandering through western Europe, Italy, the Balkans, and Anatolia, the Levant, the Caucasus, India, Egypt, and ending in Libya (that is, Africa). Throughout the text, Strabo quotes other geographers and scholars (Artemidorus, Eratosthenes, Hipparchus, Philetas, Polybius, Posidonius, Pytheas, Thucydides), as well as poets and playwrights (Aeschylus, Euripides, Homer, Sophocles), often criticizing their claims as inaccurate, invalid, bogus, or outright lies.

Running to 1104 pages, *Strabo's Geography* is a monumental work. The new translation makes for a highly accessible and welcome rereading of this eclectic, yet essential, guide from antiquity. **AH**

– Lindsay Powell



Plato
A Civic Life

By Carol Atack
ISBN: 978-1789149463
Reaktion Books (2024) - £15.99

www.reaktionbooks.co.uk

Who hasn't heard of Plato? Even if you haven't read his works, you will likely know the name. He is one of the most well-known philosophers from the ancient world, if not the most well-known. His works influenced later European philosophy, especially after the Renaissance, and even Christianity. In *Plato: A Civic Life*, Carol Atack seeks to delve into what we know about Plato's life, from his own writings to the accounts of ancient biographers and the historical context within which Plato was active, in order to show how "Plato's philosophy developed from his experiences in Athens and his interactions with philosophers in Athens and beyond" (p. 13).

There is no lack of biographical material from antiquity for a modern biographer to utilize in such an endeavour. However, as Atack explains several times throughout the book, the details in such works are better to understand how Plato was thought about in later centuries than for learning about Plato's life. For example, Diogenes Laertius' biography of Plato, which uniquely fills an entire book of his work on the lives of ancient philosophers, is "riddled with anachronisms and chronological difficulty" (pp. 14–15). Similarly, the many anecdotes about Plato recorded in Athenaeus' *Dinner Sophists* are also "implausible" (p. 15). Atack, in opposition to other recent biographies of Plato, also questions the usefulness of the letters attributed to Plato, especially the so-called *Seventh Letter*, as the writing of such letters was "a common classroom exercise in later antiquity" (p. 16). What's more, Plato rarely included details about his own life in his writings, save for his relations, which might explain why he attracted so many anecdotes and inventive accounts. Writing a biography of Plato is, therefore, no mean feat. Yet Atack quickly dives headfirst into Plato's life, beginning with his childhood, "using all the historical and material sources available to us" (p. 9), while only initially offering a cursory critical examination of the sources (valuable explanations and asides, as well as further reading suggestions, are contained in the endnotes).

Atack's biography of Plato, especially the chapters concerning his early years, is as much a biography of Athens. Many of the details Atack discusses concern elements of Athenian politics and society, such as the debate surrounding education and Sophism in the late fifth century and gymnasium culture, and how Plato may have experienced these elements during his youth. For example, when discussing Athenian pederasty and its connection to the gymnasium, Atack notes how "The erotic tone of Plato's dialogues set in gym changing rooms shows his familiarity with the experience of the male gaze" (p. 47; see also p. 62). Yet Atack also employs elements from Plato's life and explores how these would have affected him and his outlook on the world. For example, Atack proposes that the deaths of Plato's father and stepfather during his youth may have led him to see Socrates as a father figure, which would explain why his death – which Atack describes as "a turning point" in Plato's life (p. 90) – appears to have affected him so strongly. As Atack's account goes further in Plato's life, his philosophy and that of his contemporary philosophers takes the fore, with Atack offering brief but effective examinations of relatively complicated topics.

Unfortunately, there were times when Atack's discussions were just brief. This was typically the case when Atack offered a judgement as to why a certain biographical detail or passage was unreliable. For example, when Plato's supposed early attempts at writing dithyrambs and drama are brought up, Atack comments – in the notes – that "the details are suspect" (p. 208, n. 27), but does not elaborate on why or how this may impact our understanding of Plato. There are plenty of references in the notes for readers to follow interesting topics up with, but more elaboration in the main text would have been welcome. Additionally, there were moments where incorrect information, such as Atack claiming Nicias, not Cleon or Demosthenes, commanded the Athenians during the Battle of Pylos in 425 BC, or outdated ideas, such as describing how hoplite battles were, at times, like "rugby scrums" (p. 104). Aside from incorrect information, which is very infrequent, as far as I can tell, these issues largely stem, in my opinion, from the fact that this book is very much intended as an introduction to both Plato and the world he inhabited. As an introduction, it is very effective, offering readers a well-written narrative full of interesting moments from Plato's life with plenty of further reading options, but readers more familiar with ancient Greece may find the book, while interesting, somewhat shallow in parts. **AH**

– Owain Williams

READINGS: THE PHOENICIANS

Want to learn about this seafaring people who spread across the Mediterranean world? Here are some books & articles to check out.

PHOENICIANS AND THE MAKING OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

By Caroline López-Ruiz
Harvard University Press, 2021
ISBN: 978-0674988187

This highly informative book chronicles the Phoenicians' exploration of the Mediterranean. However, rather than discussing the push and pull factors that drove their exploration, López-Ruiz instead highlights the Phoenicians interactions with the peoples they met on their travels, from the Iberian Peninsula to Cyprus, and how they influenced one another.

THE PHOENICIANS AND THE WEST:
POLITICS, COLONIES AND TRADE (2ND ED.)

By Maria Eugenia Aubet
Cambridge University Press, 2001
ISBN: 978-0521795432

Maria Eugenia Aubet was considered the leading expert on the Phoenicians' presence in the western Mediterranean, and *The Phoenicians and the West* was very well received. Not only does Aubet explore the Phoenicians' exploration of the western Mediterranean, she also discusses the socio-political situation in Phoenicia, from trade to the arrival of the Assyrians.

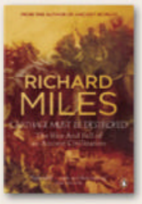
A SHORT HISTORY OF THE PHOENICIANS
(REVISED EDITION)

A Short History of the Phoenicians

By Mark Woolmer
Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021
ISBN: 978-1350153929

Based on recent archaeological discoveries and research, Mark Woolmer offers an accessible introduction to the ancient Phoenicians. While their overseas exploration is a key part of their history, it is only a small part of Woolmer's book, which also covers Phoenician society, religion, and material culture, offering readers a comprehensive examination of the topic.

CARTHAGE MUST BE DESTROYED: THE RISE AND FALL OF A MEDITERRANEAN CIVILIZATION



By Richard Miles
Penguin Books, 2011
ISBN: 978-0141018096

Carthage was the most successful Phoenician colony, rising from a small settlement on the coast of North Africa to the centre of a vast maritime empire. In this book, Richard Miles guides readers on this city's long history, from its foundation in the Early Iron Age to its destruction at the hands of the Romans. No history of the Phoenicians is complete without Carthage.

Other books and articles

Overlooked innovators (Murray Dahm)

- Markoe G.E. *The Phoenicians*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
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A question of identity (Caroline López-Ruiz)

- Demetriou, D. *Phoenicians Among Others: Why Migrants Mattered in the Ancient World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023.
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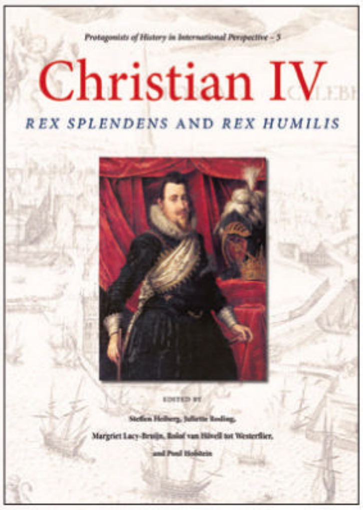
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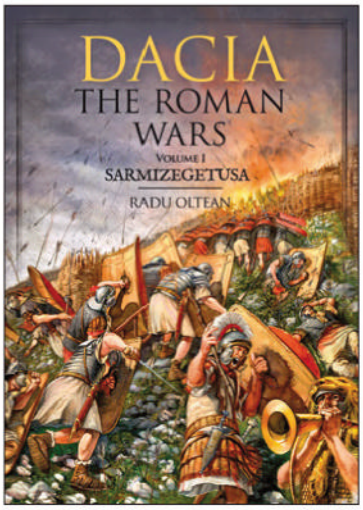
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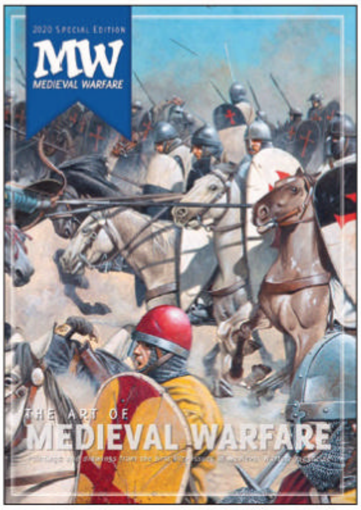
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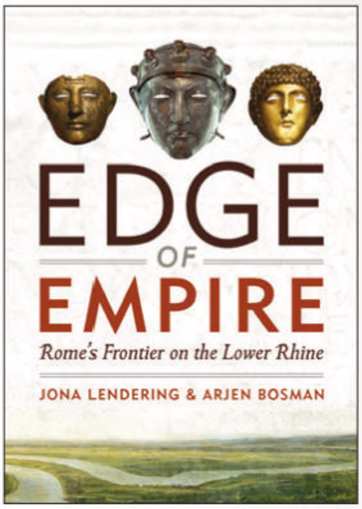
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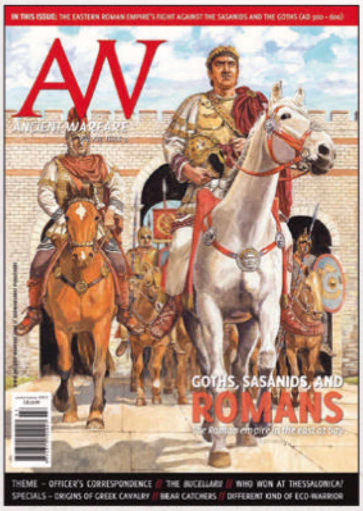
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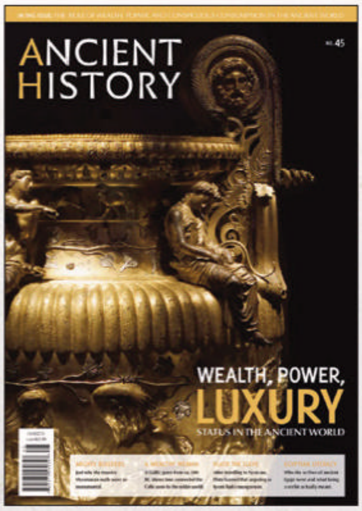
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